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THE LOSS OF INNOCENCE:  
AMERICA'S TRIAL IN VIETNAM

PETER W. SOVEREL

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THE LOSS OF INNOCENCE:  
AMERICA'S TRIAL IN VIETNAM

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## FOREWORD

The agony rending Vietnam is similar to many faceted gem: light from divergent sources is refracted and reflected in different directions reinforcing in some and destructively interfering in others, causing the gem to flash and sparkle with relatively dull spots in between. The war in Vietnam refracts and reflects ideas and issues in such a manner. Each of the participants--the United States, the Republic of Vietnam (RVN), National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NLF), the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV)--will view the struggle and the issues with different perspectives modified by respective social norms. Vietnam is an ideological, tactical and strategic refracting lense giving all viewers a different impression of the facts or "truth" since they will view the phenomenon from divergent angles. This already confused scene is further distorted with the views held by the major allies and supporters of the belligerents, in particular, the Soviet Union and the Chinese People's Republic (CPR). Through the resulting shadows the United States must thread its way towards the ultimate objective of "peace." Where is the route to this seemingly remote and almost unattainable goal and is it possible for us as a nation to traverse that path? The United States has proclaimed it is for self-determination without coercion from external forces. Yet even while the United States was declaring for these noble principles, the Republic of Vietnam was jailing dissenters within that country.

Is the defense of the Republic of Vietnam against an insurgency led by the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam and an external aggression mounted by the People's Army of Vietnam in the national interest of the United States? Would a US withdrawal from Vietnam, leaving the war to the Vietnamese to settle among themselves, have major, perhaps



destabilizing, repercussion throughout the world reflecting on the credibility of the United States' determination to back, with armed strength if necessary, commitments to other nations? What is the meaning of "National Honor" and is it central to a nation's survival and in particular is it vital to the survival of the United States? Would the success of a war of national liberation in Vietnam serve as a stimulus to dissident groups in other countries to resolve their grievances through insurrection? Would such a victory encourage the DRV, CPR, or USSR to use this type of warfare as a vehicle to expand their control into new spheres with the resulting increased probability of a direct US-USSR or US-CPR conflict of interest?

These are some of the questions which I consider central to the resolution of the Vietnam problem. To a greater or lesser degree all of these are directly tied to the US position in Vietnam. It is unlikely that successive Administrations would have squandered so much national treasure, blood and political capital on such an esoteric goal as self-determination.

If that was the only reason for US presence why are we not fighting in Rhodesia, South Africa, Czechoslovakia, or a score of similar centers of injustice or totalitarianism? Concepts such as Honor, Duty, National Interest, Victory and Defeat are compelling. Therefore, unless militarily defeated, a nation must convince itself before embarking on any policy that its National Interest and Honor are best served by that policy without prejudice to the Nation's Duty to its own citizens and friendly powers. Viewed in this context, self-determination in Vietnam could conceivably be considered by the US as Victory because the Enemy will have been Defeated in his effort to destroy by force of arms the government we have assumed the Duty to defend and therefore our Honor will have been preserved. On





the other hand self-determination might be viewed as a defeat for the NLF since it is unlikely that the NLF's political base is equal to its military capability.

If Vietnam is a zero-sum gain situation then a US Victory must be accompanied by a DRV/NLF Defeat. Since neither the US/RVN or the DRV/NLF have been defeated on the battlefield, any victory would require one side to acquiesce at the conference table to a defeat as yet unsustained in combat which would clearly not be in any nation's National Interest. Therefore, any solution to this complicated situation must necessarily involve some self-deception by all parties; each convincing itself of two facts. First, its Enemy had not achieved Victory. Second, if it had not achieved a Victory at the expense of the Enemy neither had a Defeat been sustained even if minimum war objectives may have been compromised.



# I

## RISE OF THE PHOENIX

The roots of the present conflict in Vietnam lie buried in the settlement to the previous war in Indochina, the so called First Indochina War. By the Spring of 1954 the armed forces of the rebellious Democratic Republic of Vietnam, then known as the Vietminh, had wrested the offensive from the French Union Forces in the main theatre of combat operations, Tonkin.<sup>1</sup> Attacking French positions in the highlands on the periphery of the Red River Delta the Vietminh commander, General Nguyen Vo Giap, had forced the French Union Forces to become so dispersed trying to hold all positions that they were unable to launch any serious counter offensives to break the Vietminh strangle hold in the country side.<sup>2</sup> An attempt to regain the offensive and lure the main force Vietminh formations into a set battle where they would, in theory, be destroyed by superior French firepower was made in the beginning of 1954 by the new French commander in Indochina, General Henri Navarré. He devised the now famous Navarré Plan. The Plan called for the establishment of air heads deep in Vietminh territory athwart the Vietminh lines of communications. Giap would then be forced to fight in order to maintain these lines of communications. When the fight developed, a highly mobile reserve held in the Red River Delta would be committed and the Vietminh would be destroyed.<sup>3</sup> The first of these air heads was established at Diem Bien Phu in February 1954.

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<sup>1</sup>B. B. Fall and M. G. Raskin, The Vietnam Reader: Articles and Documents on American Foreign Policy and the Vietnam Crisis (New York, N.Y.: Vintage Books, 1965) p. 82.

<sup>2</sup>B. B. Fall, The Two Vietnams (New York, N.Y.: Praeger, 1967) pp. 114-122.

<sup>3</sup>General Henri Navarré, L'Agonie de l'Indochine (Paris: L'Editions de Paris, 1958) pp. 151-164.



As Navarré's plan was launched Britain, France, the United States and the USSR agreed to an international conference to be held in Geneva in April to discuss the problems in both Korea and Indochina.<sup>4</sup> This French decision to investigate a negotiated settlement to the eight-year-old-war seemed to have been a signal to Giap to improve the DRV's negotiating position. Stepping up the raids along the edge of the Red River Delta, Giap forced Navarré to commit his counter-offensive reserve piecemeal to the defense of the Delta. When the Vietminh assault on Diem Bien Phu came, instead of having a mobile reserve of 27 battalions, the French Union reserve had swindled to 10.<sup>5</sup> With insufficient reserves and limited air power,<sup>6</sup> the French garrison was unable to cope with the massed Vietminh artillery and infantry. The battle for Diem Bien Phu was thus over almost before it began. Instead of the French Union Forces destroying the Vietminh in a set battle with superior fire power it was they who were about to be destroyed by superior fire power.

Across the Pacific even as the Vietminh seemed on the verge of a victory of unprecedented magnitude ominous storm clouds were brewing in the United States. America was heavily committed to the French war effort which was, at that time, viewed as the battle front in the struggle to contain Communism. The US Defense Support Program had been established in 1952 to provide direct economic and logistic assistance to the French Expeditionary

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<sup>4</sup>Fall and Raskin, The Vietnam Reader, p. 82.

<sup>5</sup>Navarré L'Agonie de l'Indochine, pp. 152-226.

<sup>6</sup>Even at the height of the battle for Diem Bien Phu the French had only about 210 strike aircraft available for combat operations in all of Indochina. B. B. Fall, Street Without Joy (Harrisburg, Pa. : Stackpole, 1967) p. 258.





Force. The initial allocation was 30.5 million dollars.<sup>7</sup> By 1954 the US was furnishing hundreds of millions of dollars in aid including scores of B-26 and F-8-F "Bearcat" aircraft.<sup>8</sup> US aircrews were flying transport and resupply planes on combat missions.<sup>9</sup>

The rapidly deteriorating military situation in Indochina was viewed with increasing alarm by the US. Influential elements within the Administration were advocating, in March 1953, direct American military intervention to prevent a Vietminh victory. On 25 March Admiral Radford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, met with French General Paul Ely. Ely was in the United States to elicit increased American aid to stabilize the military situation permitting France to exit gracefully and honorably,<sup>10</sup> while making it clear that France was unwilling to continue the war in an attempt to defeat the Vietminh. Radford, apparently somewhat exceeding his authority, proposed a massive, one shot, Guernecia-type US air attack, launched from carriers and US bases in the Phillippines, against the Vietminh besieging Diem Bien Phu.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>D. D. Eisenhower, Mandate for Change (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1963) p. 167.

<sup>8</sup>Joseph Buttinger, Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled (London: Pall Mal Press, 1967) p. 1070.

<sup>9</sup>As noted both in Buttinger's Dragon Embattled and Victor Bator's, Vietnam: A Diplomatic Tragedy, (Dobbs Ferry, N.J.: Oceana Publishers, 1963) pages 1070 and 206 respectively, this was a far cry from the pre-1950 period when the United States viewed the struggle as a colonial repression of native nationalism. The Administration went to extraordinary, indeed almost absurd, lengths to maintain American neutrality. In that context the U.S. went so far as to insist upon the removal of propellers manufactured in the United States from aircraft supplied by Great Britain to France for use in Indochina.

<sup>10</sup>Fall, The Two Vietnams, p. 225.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.



Secretary of State Dulles overruled the Radford plan and replaced it with a more ambitious "united action" plan. In a speech to the Overseas Press Club on 29 March 1954 the Secretary said:

The imposition of Southeast Asia of the political system of Communist Russia and its Chinese Communist ally, by whatever means, would be a grave threat to the whole Free World community and should not be passively accepted but should be met by united action...<sup>12</sup>

Dulles explained to Henri Bonnet, French ambassador to America, on 5 April 1954 that the US, UK and France must form a democratic, anti-colonial coalition. That coalition would then take united action to persuade the Vietminh that they did not have the slightest chance of achieving victory.<sup>13</sup> Growing US concern was evident at Dulles' 5 April press conference when he refused to rule out unilateral US intervention if the situation continued to deteriorate.<sup>14</sup> The full significance of Dulles' phrase "by whatever means" became clear when, on the following day, Dulles informed the House Committee on Foreign Affairs that the threat of Communist victory in any part of Southeast Asia, regardless of means, might result in US intervention.<sup>15</sup>

While the Radford offer for unilateral air intervention had been withdrawn and tied instead to "united action," the United States seemed increasingly willing to commit American combat elements to the Indochina War. Apparently stiffened by this new American attitude, France--even as the

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<sup>12</sup>Department of State Bulletin XXX, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1954) pp. 539-543.

<sup>13</sup>Jean Lacoutre and Philippe Deviller, La Fin D'une Guerre (Paris: L'Editions du Seuil, 1960) p. 79.

<sup>14</sup>New York Times, 6 April 1954, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup>Bator, Vietnam: A Diplomatic Tragedy, p. 39.



the Geneva Conference was opening--was moving rapidly to improve its military position in Indochina. In a rather pointed maneuver in late April and early May two French metropolitan divisions, including for the first time draftees,<sup>16</sup> were inoculated for tropical duty and notified to be prepared for immediate deployment to Indochina. Simultaneously, France was sending powerful reinforcements to Tonkin in a US supplied and operated air lift.<sup>17</sup>

Yet in spite of the French reinforcements and the new US willingness to intervene as a member of a collective action front, the negotiating position of the Western Democracies was relatively weak in relation to that of the Communist nations in general and the DRV in particular. In contrast to the solid negotiating front maintained by the DRV, USSR and CPR the Democracies had no front at all. Publically the United States was willing to intervene only as a member of an anti-colonial, democratic coalition which France was unwilling to join, fearing such a move would cause the Conference to fail. Britain was less than enthused over Dulles' united action proposal and made agreement to such action dependent on French acceptance and a collapse of the Conference.<sup>18</sup>

Of course, overshadowing all other considerations was the battle raging at Diem Bien Phu with the hopeless plight and ultimate fate of the French garrison obvious to all. Finally the garrison's agony ended when the fort

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<sup>16</sup>All French Union Forces in Indochina were composed entirely of regulars with no reservists or draftees. W. R. Fishel, Vietnam: Anatomy of a Conflict (Itasca, Ill.: Peacock Publishers, 1968) p. 51.

<sup>17</sup>New York Times, 22 April 1954, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup>Buttinger, Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled, pp. 821-22 and Bator, Vietnam: A Diplomatic Tragedy, chapter 3, develops this thesis.





fell with 15,000 French Union POW's on 8 May 1954, just eleven days after the Geneva Conference opened. The defeat at Diem Bien Phu, more than a simple military disaster,<sup>19</sup> was a crushing political blow to the French national will to continue.

As the Conference began on 27 April 1954 with the US, UK, USSR, CPR, DRV, France, Laos, Cambodia and the newly created State of Vietnam in attendance, the Vietminh were in a commanding position. Diem Bien Phu was being captured, the Western camp was in disarray and the Vietminh was in the process of launching a powerful offensive against the French stronghold in the Tonkin Basin.<sup>20</sup> In fact, French estimates of Vietminh strength were so depressing that Generals Ely and Salan advocated--in a top secret report of their official investigation of the Indochina situation--abandoning all of Vietnam north of the 16th parallel to the Vietminh and concentrating the remaining elements of the Expeditionary Force in South Vietnam.<sup>21</sup> In this atmosphere the Vietminh leadership had every reason to believe any settlement would be overwhelmingly in their favor. In this respect they were to be bitterly disappointed.

Instead of providing the staunch support which might have been expected, for the DRV's political objectives, Molotov and Chou En-lai took the lead at Geneva, within the Communist camp, of finding a compromise solution. (See Appendix I) The major concessions were agreed to first by either Molotov or Chou En-lai in conference with Western leaders. They then worked agreement within the Communist group.

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<sup>19</sup>As high as they were, the casualties suffered by the French Union Forces at Diem Bien Phu represented less than five percent of the French forces in Indochina.

<sup>20</sup>Fall, The Two Vietnams, pp. 126-127.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.



In this manner Chou abandoned a central DRV contention that the Cambodian Khmers and Laotian Pathet Lao movements were indigenous, anti-colonial insurgencies and as such were entitled to local autonomy. On 16 June 1954 Chou called for removal of all foreign troops from Laos and Cambodia and a separate settlement of the Cambodian and Laotian questions.<sup>22</sup> Without directly saying so, Chou made it clear that the Khmers and Pathet Lao were not native insurgents, as claimed by the DRV.<sup>23</sup> This made settlement of the Cambodian and Laotian questions relatively simple and separate from the infinitely more complex question of Vietnam. Heretofore the DRV had consistently avoided concessions on this point and had tied a Vietnam settlement to one in Laos and Cambodia.

Similarly, Molotov agreed, during a series of July meetings with British Foreign Minister Eden and French Premier Mendes-Frances, to the essential elements of the US-UK seven point memorandum.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>New York Times, 17 June 1954, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup>Lacoutre and Deviller, La Fin D'une Guerre, p. 217.

<sup>24</sup>Bator, Vietnam: A Diplomatic Tragedy, p. 122. The joint US-UK memorandum was an outline of US and UK objectives in Indochina. The stated objectives were: (1) Independence of Laos and Cambodia to be accomplished by withdrawal of all Vietminh forces within those countries. (2) Preserve the Southern half of Vietnam with demarcation not to be south of Dong Hoi--just north of the 17th parallel--and, if possible, an enclave in the Tonkin Delta. (3) No imposed restrictions on ability of Cambodia, Laos and the free portion of Vietnam to maintain stable, non-Communist governments--specifically, right to maintain adequate armed force, import arms and advisors. (4) No political clause that might lead to the loss of the free zones to the Communists. (5) Not to rule out possible, future, peaceful reunification of Vietnam. (6) To permit free transfer of civilians who wish to do so from one zone to the other. (7) Establish an effective international control system. Lacoutre and Deviller, La Fin D'une Guerre, pp. 244-245.



Finally, on July 20, Mendes-France received from Molotov two critical concessions: provisional partition of Vietnam along the 17th parallel and elections within two years to determine political reunification of the two zones instead of demarcation along the 13th parallel and elections within weeks after the armistice as demanded by the DRV.<sup>25</sup> From the Western view point these two concessions made a settlement possible by providing France with a package she could accept and justify to her American and British allies.

The DRV had no real choice but to accept the Sino-Soviet proposed solution. As strong as the DRV's military position might have been, the Vietminh would have been hard pressed to maintain their recent gains, much less continue the offensive without the very significant logistic support already in progress from China. Thus, even though Molotov's agreement to the division of Vietnam along the 17th parallel and Chou En-Lai's declaration on the removal of "foreign" troops from Laos and Cambodia meant withdrawal from vast tracts of Vietminh controlled territory, the only alternative to the Chou-Molotov solution bought with concessions of DRV gains was for the DRV to continue the fight alone. To continue alone would have been a most difficult, although perhaps possible, task.

A principal DRV objective was, then as it remains today, a unified Vietnam. The realities of the Vietminh's political and military advantages notwithstanding the DRV had received little or no support from its nominal allies, the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union. In the face of the rapidly hardening Western attitude, under considerable Soviet and Chinese pressure to reach a compromise solution, the DRV apparently decided

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<sup>25</sup>Buttinger, Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled, p. 834.





that possible political concessions, including a unified Vietnam, which might--but not necessarily--be forced through continued fighting, were outweighed by the possibility of direct American and/or a greatly expanded French effort.

On 21 July 1954 the Conference reached "agreement" on the settlement of the Indochina War. The Geneva Agreements relating to Vietnam are composed of two principal documents: Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Vietnam and the Final Declaration of the Geneva Conference. The Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities was a military cease fire agreement which was signed and executed by the French Union and Vietminh military authorities. Basically this document provided for:

1. The regrouping of Vietminh forces in North Vietnam and French Union Forces in South Vietnam within three hundred days of the signing of the document.
2. The free movement of Vietnamese civilians between the two zones during those same three hundred days.
3. A demilitarized zone separating North and South Vietnam.
4. Prohibition of the establishment of new bases, bases under the control of a foreign power, introduction of new weapons or reinforcements or participation of either North or South Vietnam in any alliance system.
5. Establishment of the International Supervisory and Control Commission to oversee the armistice.

Significantly, this document is only a military armistice signed by the respective military commands. All political considerations were left unresolved.

The political matters were purportedly resolved by the Final Declaration. The Declaration took note of the agreement to end hostilities in Vietnam then moved to define a political settlement:



6. The Conference recognizes that the essential purpose of the agreement relating to Vietnam is to settle military questions with a view to ending hostilities and that the military demarcation line is provisional and should not in any way be interpreted as constituting a political or territorial boundary.
7. The conference declares that...the settlement of political problems, affected on the basis of respect for the principles of independence, unity, and territorial integrity shall permit the Vietnamese people to enjoy the fundamental freedoms, guaranteed by democratic institutions established as a result of free general elections by secret ballot. In order to ensure that sufficient progress in the restoration of peace has been made, and that all the necessary conditions obtain for free expression of the national will, general elections shall be held in July, 1956, under the supervision of an International Supervisory Commission...
8. The competent representative authorities of the North and South zones of Vietnam...must not permit any individual or collective reprisals against persons who have collaborated in any way with one of the parties during the war...<sup>26</sup>

The Declaration clearly states that the demarcation line is not to be construed as a political boundary and commands that national elections to determine unification, "shall be held in July, 1956," under suitable international supervision. Yet the Declaration is an unsigned document of suspect validity without any provision made for enforcement. The Conference participants, with the notable exceptions of the United States and the State of Vietnam, merely took note of the Final Declaration and then verbally assented to its contents.

Both the United States and the State of Vietnam refused even to agree to the Declaration, implying that the interests of the non-Communist elements in Vietnam were not being safeguarded. The American representative, Under Secretary of State W. B. Smith, stated the US position as:

...(i) it will refrain from the threat or the use of force to disturb them,...(ii) it would view any renewal of the aggression in violation of the aforesaid agreements with grave concern and as seriously

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<sup>26</sup> Fishel, Vietnam: Anatomy of a Conflict, pp. 61-67.



threatening international peace and security...

With respect to the statement made by the representative of the State of Vietnam, the United States reiterates its traditional position that peoples are entitled to determine their own future and that it will not join any arrangement to hinder this...<sup>27</sup>

Since the settlement had not worked out in a manner acceptable to the US, America would not consider itself bound by the Agreements and specifically that portion relating to the principal of self-determination of the people of South Vietnam.<sup>28</sup> Since the population of the Northern Zone was greater than that of the south it was conceivable indeed probable, that all of Vietnam would be united under DRV control if the South did not have a veto power on this matter.

The conclusion of so vast a war through the instrument of an unsigned treaty of dubious legitimacy and which two parties central to the war refused to recognize as binding was a unique development in international conflict resolution. Not binding any of the parties and the failures of the United States and the State of Vietnam to even assent to the Declaration were open invitations to resume hostilities or, for any party, to disregard any provision of the Declaration not suiting that party's purposes. In view of the traditional Communist care in regard to the legal niceties of political arrangements, the decision to accept a document of suspect legality is more than somewhat confusing. Not only had the DRV's political objective of a unified Vietnam been frustrated at Geneva, but the document providing for

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<sup>27</sup> Department of State Bulletin Volume XXXI #788 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1954) pp. 162-163.

<sup>28</sup> The Declaration's call for elections on unification made no provisions for the eventuality that a majority of South Vietnamese voted for independence but the total pan-Vietnamese vote was for unification.



the eventual unification was an unsigned statement not even assented to by the rival State of Vietnam.

To argue that the DRV accepted these marginally satisfactory arrangements because they expected South Vietnam to be assimilated into the DRV as a result of the proposed unification elections is to disregard the facts. The election to unify Vietnam would require agreement of State of Vietnam which had refused to even agree to the general terms of the Geneva Settlement. Rather, the quiet acquiescence seems to indicate that the DRV and especially her Communist confederates, the Soviet Union and the CPR, realized to press for a clear cut military victory was a course fraught with the unacceptable danger of provoking United States intervention. This realization prompted settlement for lesser goals. The experiences of Korea and Germany illustrated the futility of unification of different Sovereign Zones through peaceful means. Since these methods would hardly be likely to be more successful in Vietnam, the lack of a signed document relating to political settlement would preserve DRV freedom of political action to achieve their primary foreign policy objective: the unification of Vietnam.

If in the First Indochina War the Vietminh had defeated one enemy, they had acquired another which was determined to prevent DRV expansion and specifically control of South Vietnam; the United States. Two days after the Geneva Conference Secretary of State Dulles outlined the US objectives in Southeast Asia:

The important thing from now on is not to mourn the past but to seize the future opportunity to prevent the loss of Northern Vietnam from leading to the extension of Communism throughout Southeast Asia...We must bear in mind that the problem is not merely one of deterring open aggression but preventing Communist subversion which,





taking advantage of economic dislocation and social injustice, might weaken and finally overthrow the non-Communist governments.<sup>29</sup>

President Eisenhower, fearing these conditions might exist in South Vietnam, sent his now famous letter to the South Vietnamese Head of State, Prime Minister Diem, just three months after the Geneva Conference. In that letter, dated 23 October 1954, the President assured Diem of US military and economic assistance to thwart any Communist attempt to overthrow his government:

The implications of the agreements concerning Vietnam have caused grave concern regarding the future of a country temporarily divided...weakened by a long and exhausting war and faced with enemies without, and their subversive collaborators within...The purpose of this offer (military and economic assistance) is to assist the government of Vietnam in developing and maintaining a strong, viable state capable of resisting attempted subversion or aggression through military means.<sup>30</sup>

To contain what the Eisenhower administration considered aggressive and expansionistic Chinese Communism and what was then assumed to be their wards, the DRV, the United States was most active in organizing, almost before the ink was dry on the Geneva Agreements, the Southeast Asia Defense Treaty. The Treaty, signed by the US, France, UK, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, Pakistan and the Philippines, was designed to defeat both overt, conventional aggression and covert aggression through subversive activity, became effective

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<sup>29</sup> Department of State Bulletin Volume XXXI (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1954) p. 163.

<sup>30</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, Documents of American Foreign Relations 1954 (New York, NY: Harper & Rowe 1955); pp. 366-367.



on 19 February 1955.<sup>31</sup> The 1954 Geneva Agreement prevented Laos, Cambodia or the regrouping zones of Vietnam from becoming members of a military alliance system. A protocol to the Treaty extended treaty protection to those countries:

Realizing the importance to the security of Southeast Asia and the Southwest Pacific the States of Cambodia, Laos and the free territory under the jurisdiction of the State of Vietnam, the Council reaffirmed the determination of the member governments to support these three states in maintaining their freedom and independence.<sup>32</sup>

The extension of anti-communist treaty protection to Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam with the rather pointed protocol reference to the "free territory" in South Vietnam was understandably viewed in Hanoi, Peking and Moscow as an action aimed at the DRV:<sup>33</sup>

In the Orient, the American imperialists...organize the Southeast Treaty Organization aiming at sabotaging the Geneva Agreements and the peace in Southeast Asia.<sup>34</sup>

The United States and the DRV were even at this early date on a collision course. The DRV was determined to lead a unified Vietnam while the United States was equally determined to prevent the spread of Communism in Asia by supporting independent, non-Communist governments and in particular the

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<sup>31</sup>Communique of the Southeast Asia Treaty Council on 25 February 1955 in Department of State Bulletin XXXII (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1955) p. 371.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>"Joint Communique of the Soviet Government and the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam," A. B. Cole, Conflict in Indochina and International Repercussions 1946-1955 (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1956) pp. 241-244.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 205.



the State of Vietnam.<sup>35</sup>

In South Vietnam Premier Diem was working a minor miracle rendering a semblance of order out of chaos. Through skillful political maneuvering Diem had overcome very significant factional differences and obtained, by mid-1955, the allegiance of the powerful Hoa Hoa, Cao Dai, and Buddhist sects and the Army.<sup>36</sup> Arrangements were made for the resettlement of 800,000 refugees from the North, a modest land reform program was instituted and a measure of political stability was achieved. The emergence in South Vietnam of a national government which was rapidly consolidating its power must have been viewed with considerable alarm by the DRV proper and Southern Vietminh as a rival center of power.

Diem, however, did not feel sufficiently strong to challenge the DRV at the ballot box. The Geneva Final Declaration simply called for national elections to determine unification. There was no provision made to cover the possibility of a majority in South Vietnam opposing unification while a total Vietnamese vote might have favored unification. Under those circumstances South Vietnam would have been united with the North against the will of the South Vietnamese. North Vietnam with a larger population and an assured vote of 99.6% (which presumably would be delivered) favoring unification would cause South Vietnam to be absorbed by the DRV even if the equally deliverable southern vote was not in favor of unification.

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<sup>35</sup> On 27 June 1950 President Truman established the support of non-communist, independent governments in Asia as an American objective following the outbreak of the Korean War. Department of State Bulletin XXIII (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1952) p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> Fall and Raskin, The Vietnam Reader, pp. 75-78.





With at least tacit US approval, Diem refused to participate in the called for unification elections. Conveniently recalling that the State of Vietnam had not become party to the Final Declaration, Diem declined DRV attempts to schedule the elections:

We did not sign the Geneva Agreements...but it is out of the question to consider any proposal from the Vietminh if proof is not given that they put the superior interests of the National Community above those of Communism...

This refusal was met with relatively mild protest from the DRV. However, in South Vietnam, as the 20 July deadline approached without any prospects for elections the former Vietminh, now to be called Viet Cong, initiated an assassination campaign against local level government officials.<sup>37</sup> At first the insurgency was extremely small, with limited capabilities and virtually no outside or foreign assistance.<sup>38</sup> Had Diem responded to this threat with the attitude that when 'freedom is threatened the best defense is more freedom' it might have been contained. Instead Diem himself set the stage and played the tune which led to widespread insurgency.

At the conclusion of the First Indochina War many former guerilla fighters refused movement to the North and returned to civilian occupations. Hidden among these legitimate civilians were about 5000 hardcore, elite Vietminh "stay-behinds"; that is, guerrillas who pretended to resume civilian chores but in actuality remained guerrillas who had simply hidden their weapons while awaiting the call to arms from Vietminh headquarters.<sup>39</sup> Diem

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid, p. 91.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid, pp. 91-94.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid, p. 88.



recognized the threat these hardcore stay-behinds posed. The Diem government initiated a program to locate and identify former Vietminh. Many so identified were no longer affiliated with the resistance movement yet they were subjected to arbitrary arrest, imprisonment and/or bureaucratic harrassment.

To combat the rising incidence of terror, Diem issued, in January 1956, the infamous Presidential Ordinance Number Six, which provided for the indefinite detention of persons determined by military tribunal to be "dangerous for national defense and public security."<sup>40</sup> This ordinance was followed by more repressive measures. Their impact was significantly greater on the non-Communist nationalist elements, which in a normal society might have been categorized as the oposition, than on the Communist-led subversives who were geared for clandestine operations. These harsh, repressive actions drove many non-Communist, liberal and moderate South Vietnamese into the insurgents' open arms if for no other reason than to escape, life and limb intact, from Diem.<sup>41</sup>

The insurgent's stepped up program of rural political indoctrination was punctuated by assassination. The Viet Cong preferred to label them "executions" by People's Courts for crimes against the people.<sup>42</sup> The assassinations were generally highly selective with the objective of destroying Government of Vietnam control in a specific area through the elimination of Republic of Vietnam local officials: province, district and hamlet chiefs, school teachers and tax collectors. The assassinations also served as

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid, p. 91.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid, p. 225.

<sup>42</sup>Fishel, Vietnam: Anatomy of a Conflict, pp. 61-67.



"lessons" to the population and demonstrations of the government's inability to govern in peace with safety. The insurgent's shadow government would then administer the area.

To maintain national control of the rural population in the face of the rapidly rising incidence of terrorist activity in June 1965 Diem, by Executive Decree, abolished all elected village councils and mayors and filled vacancies by appointment, usually from the Army of the Republic of Vietnam.<sup>43</sup> Thus Diem, by July 1965, wielded the same dictatorial powers in the countryside as he had for some time held in Saigon: the dictatorship of Diem was complete. In the short space of two years Ngo Dinh Diem had been transformed from savior to despot, alienating almost every sector of South Vietnamese society: dissent was rewarded with detention in prison, army commanders were appointed on the basis of personal loyalty to Diem instead of command ability, the regime was run by the Diem Family clique isolated from the governed, the land reform program was not effectively administered, widespread corruption permeated most levels of government and what limited means the public had of influencing their daily lives through their village council was denied. Diem, instead of broadening his political base, had significantly narrowed it through his unenlightened policies and in so doing had provided the sparks to light the conflagration of revolution.

As might have been expected, the infant Viet Cong insurgency flourished under this inept approach.<sup>44</sup> In the Summer or early Fall of 1959 the DRV

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<sup>43</sup>Fall and Raskin, The Vietnam Reader, pp. 255-256.

<sup>44</sup>In 1956 official sources estimated Viet Cong strength at less than 3,000. By mid-1961 their numbers had swollen to over 15,000. Fall and Raskin, The Vietnam Reader, p. 258.



decided to enter the Southern struggle and guide the revolution to a successful conclusion. In reference to the war Ho Chi Minh was quoted in a 1960 article appearing in the Belgium periodical Red Flag:

We have to direct and bring to a close the middle-class, democratic and anti-imperialistic revolution.<sup>45</sup>

The very rapidly deteriorating political situation in South Vietnam seemed to favor clandestine intervention to quickly affect a satisfactory resolution to the problem before increased American assistance could affect the outcome. While Ho Chi Minh was announcing in effect that the DRV would support and direct the southern revolutionary struggle, it is important to note: first, that the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam had not yet been formed,<sup>46</sup> and second, since the Front did not officially exist there must have already existed in South Vietnam some administrative apparatus to funnel this DRV assistance to the insurgents.

The increased guerrilla activity of late 1959 and 1960 produced reactions by the Diem regime which led to counter and counter-counter actions rapidly blowing a low level insurgency into a major conflict. Through a series of executive decrees Diem further strengthened his dictatorial strangle hold on those portions of Vietnam still under government control during this period. The most famous of these decrees was the Executive Order of February, 1959 which set a penalty of death for "accomplices of Communism." These sentences were to be administered by the Provincial

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<sup>45</sup>Department of State, A Threat to Peace (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1961) p. 3, volume II citing President Ho Chi Minh's quote appearing in the Belgium periodical Red Flag.

<sup>46</sup>"Program of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam" in Fall and Raskin, The Vietnam Reader, p. 216.





military tribunals and their sentences were without appellate rights.

The increasingly arbitrary nature of the Saigon regime led to further civilian alienation which in turn resulted in greater guerrilla recruiting and political success. Since the population was less sympathetic to the Government of Vietnam it became more difficult to obtain accurate intelligence on the guerrilla's whereabouts and intentions. The poor intelligence helped to prevent the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) from registering significant military success. Counter-guerrilla operations became more and more scarce. The enemy had better intelligence and fought only when they considered it advantageous to do so.

The situation had, by mid-1960, become so acute that several of Diem's non-Communist critics, among them some of South Vietnam's leading personages, literally took their lives in their hands and presented the regime a list of grievances concerning Diem's Administration. This list of grievances was called the Manifesto of the Eighteen. Their comments on Policy, Administration, the Army and Social-Economic affairs are an instructive insight into some of the major problems confronting the South Vietnamese:

Let us try to draw an objective balance of the situation, without flattery or false accusations, strictly following a constructive line which you yourself have so often indicated, in the hope that the government shall modify its policies so as to extricate itself from a situation that is extremely dangerous to the very existence of the nation.

#### Policies

Continuous arrests fill the jails and prisons to the rafters...public opinion and the press are reduced to silence. The same applies to the popular will as translated in certain open elections, in which it is insulted and trampled...

Today the people want freedom. You should, Mr. President, liberalize the regime, promote democracy, guarantee minimum civil rights, recognize the opposition so as to permit the citizens to express themselves without fear...



When this occurs, the people of South Vietnam, in comparing their positions with that of the North, will appreciate the value of true liberty and authentic democracy.

#### Administration

...Competent people should be put back in the proper jobs...Favoritism based on family or party connections should be banished; the selling of influence, corruption and abuse of power must be punished.

#### Army

The purpose of the army, pillar of the defense of the country, is to stop foreign invasions and to eliminate rebel movements. It is at the service of the country and should not lend itself to the exploitations of any faction or party...The troops should be encouraged to respect their officers and the officers should be encouraged to love their men...

#### Economic and Social Affairs

The government must destroy all the obstacles standing in the way of economic development; must abolish all forms of monopoly and speculation; must create a favorable environment for investments coming from foreign friends as well as from our own citizens; must encourage commercial enterprises, develop industry and create jobs to reduce unemployment...<sup>47</sup>

The Eighteen had fingered almost every issue which was contributing to the disruption of life in South Vietnam. Unfortunately, their advice went unheeded and in November of 1960 the first of several coups was attempted against Diem when ARVN paratroopers seized Saigon. Although the coup was unsuccessful it had far reaching effects, principally, it forced Diem to be even more selective in the appointment of military commanders and to retain in Saigon sufficient troops to protect himself in case of a repeat attempt. What remained of personal liberty vanished and Diem became even more isolated from the nation which he was "leading."

The United States remained committed to Diem or at least was unable to induce him to liberalize his regime and to make it more responsive to

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<sup>47</sup>"Manifesto of the Eighteen" in Fall and Raskin, The Vietnam Reader, pp. 116-122.



the needs of its citizens. In spite of the obvious deficiencies of Diem's leadership, the US apparently felt he was at least non-Communist. In any event, the RVN was the recipient of increasing American technical, logistic and military--in the form of advisors--assistance. In the deepening Vietnam crisis of the early 1960's, President J. F. Kennedy reaffirmed American support for the RVN's struggle against subversion:

The United States for more than a decade has been assisting the Government and people of Vietnam to maintain their independence...Article IV (SEATO) stated that the United States recognized that aggression by means of armed attack against Vietnam would threaten our own security...We are attempting to prevent a Communist take-over in Vietnam...<sup>48</sup>

North Vietnamese assistance to the NLF had become so open that in June, 1962 the International Supervisory and Control Commission confirmed what had been known for some time when it found North Vietnam guilty of aiding and abetting that subversion in South Vietnam. The Commission cited North Vietnam for sending arms, munitions and men to fight for the overthrow of the RVN and the People's Army of Vietnam for permitting North Vietnam to be used as a base for aggression in the South.<sup>49</sup>

The deteriorating military and political situation in Vietnam had, by mid-1963, assumed catastrophic proportions. A US Operation Mission survey dated 14 June 1963 indicated that the Viet Cong taxed almost the entire population of South Vietnam including Saigonese. The survey rated Government of Vietnam population and resource control as "acceptably effective" in only

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<sup>48</sup> New York Times, 15 February 1962, p. 14.

<sup>49</sup> Department of State, Aggression from the North (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1965) p. 30.





six of South Vietnam's provinces.<sup>50</sup> Earlier, in January 1963, elements of the Viet Cong 514th Main Force Battalion had staged the guerrilla's first stand-and-fight battle of the war, inflicting heavy casualties on the ARVN.<sup>51</sup> During the course of the battle, the Viet Cong downed five helicopters and fought two thousand ARVN troops to a stand still near the Mekong Delta village of Ap Bac, clearly demonstrating Viet Cong ability to deal with ARVN elements in set battles. Village chiefs were being assassinated at a rate of over one thousand per year.<sup>52</sup> In 1962 the Viet Cong captured only four hundred more individual weapons than they lost while in 1963 that figure increased to thirty-one hundred.<sup>53</sup> The ARVN desertion rate was skyrocketing and by mid-1963 almost thirty percent of all replacements deserted.<sup>54</sup> In other words, by virtually every military yardstick the war was being lost at an accelerating pace. The Viet Cong were obviously getting ready to shift from Phase II to Phase III of guerrilla warfare.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>U.S. Operations Mission, Saigon, Resources Control Survey (Saigon: 14 June 1963, declassified 1 January 1964)

<sup>51</sup>Fall and Raskin, The Vietnam Reader: Articles and Documents on American Foreign Policy and the Vietnam Crisis, p. 388.

<sup>52</sup>Los Angeles Times, November 16, 1964.

<sup>53</sup>I. F. Stone, Stone's Weekly (March 8, 1965).

<sup>54</sup>American Friends Service Committee, Peace in Vietnam (New York, N.Y.: Hill and Wang 1967) p. 49.

<sup>55</sup>General Vo Nguyen Giap, in his book People's War: People's Army (New York, N.Y.: Praeger 1962), outlined the maxims of guerrilla warfare and divided the wars into three phases:

I. Organizational. Little or no fighting with the insurgents building a political base on which to operate. Limited



If the military situation was desperate, the political scene was equally alarming. Buddhist religious opposition to the Catholic Diem regime was daily gaining momentum. On 8 May 1963 twelve persons were killed in a Buddhist anti-government riot in Hue.<sup>56</sup> Following those demonstrations in Hue, martial law was proclaimed on 3 June.<sup>57</sup> The political crisis was heightened on 11 June when, in the first of several such acts, a Buddhist priest died as a result of self-immolation in protest of the Diem regime.<sup>58</sup> In response to the massive religious strife sweeping Vietnam, Diem proclaimed martial law throughout Vietnam.<sup>59</sup>

Massive US military, technical and economic assistance notwithstanding, Diem had succeeded in alienating almost every segment of South Vietnamese society, providing the insurgents with ample political ammunition to undermine Government of Vietnam (GVN) control throughout South Vietnam. A sometimes overlooked fact of paramount importance was Diem's conversion of the ARVN from a proud, reasonably efficient and<sup>60</sup> organized army into a

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assassinations designed as "lessons" to "educate" the population.

- II. Strategic Defense. Small unit ambushes against exposed enemy positions. Marked by careful planning and avoidance of contact with superior enemy formations.
- III. Strategic Counter Offensive. As a result of many probing attacks on periphery, enemy has become dispersed and weakened. Guerrilla's form conventional units and defeat enemy in war maneuver. pp. 39-64.

<sup>56</sup>New York Times, May 9, 1963, p. 1.

<sup>57</sup>New York Times, June 4, 1963, p. 1.

<sup>58</sup>New York Times, June 12, 1963, p. 1.

<sup>59</sup>New York Times, August 22, 1963, p. 1.

<sup>60</sup>Fall, Street Without Joy, p. 321.



faction-ridden, inefficient organization, where officer promotion was based on political favor instead of ability.

In a move born of desperation the United States apparently signaled ARVN military dissidents in the Fall of 1963 that the American 'sink or swim with Diem' policy was over and consequently the US would not be displeased over a military coup. Such a coup was carried out on 1 November when Diem was replaced by a military junta.<sup>61</sup> The most damaging and lasting legacy left by Diem was the tradition of factionalism and competing interest groups which Diem had played off against each other.

In addition to a counter-insurgency struggle Diem had fostered considerable in-fighting among non-Communist elements, pitting Buddhists against Catholics, Montagnard against lowlanders, Northern refugees against indigenous South Vietnamese, the Army against the civilians and peasants against urban dwellers.<sup>62</sup> The prejudices, suspicions and wounds inflicted during this sometimes vicious and deadly war within a war will be years in healing. This legacy of bitterness will make the formation of a truly united front in opposition to the NLF SVN most difficult because of the distrust and hatred between competing groups of non-Communist South Vietnamese.

Neither the government resulting from the 1 November coup, nor any of those in the bewildering succession that followed during the next eighteen months, was able to stabilize or reverse the military situation which was collapsing at an accelerating rate. By January 1965, it was clear that

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<sup>61</sup>New York Times, March 11, 1963, p. 1. In the process of the coup Diem was arrested and then assassinated.

<sup>62</sup>Fall and Raskin, The Vietnam Reader, p. 332.



without the immediate introduction of US combat elements and supporting arms to stiffen the will of the ARVN and check the flood of NVA/Viet Cong successes, the prospects for the RVN's survival were most remote.<sup>63</sup> With this fact in mind, NLF/DRV actions during the second half of 1964 and early 1965 appear illogical and ill-considered. Especially with respect to the US their tactics were at cross purposes with their strategic objective, the overthrow of the Republic of Vietnam and the unification of Vietnam.

As early as January, 1964 the US had sounded warnings on the gravity of the Vietnam situation and reaffirmed the absolute US opposition to a Communist victory in South Vietnam, Secretary of Defense McNamara, in a prepared statement before the House Armed Forces Committee on 27 January 1964 stated:

...The survival of an independent government in South Vietnam is so important to the security of Southeast Asia and to the free world I can conceive of no alternative other than to take all necessary measures within our capability to prevent a Communist victory....<sup>64</sup>

An even more direct warning was sounded on 22 May by Secretary Rusk:

...A third choice would be to expand the war. This can be the result if the Communists persist in their course of aggression.<sup>65</sup>

The United States was not going to passively watch the DRV achieve a victory in Vietnam.

In spite of the unmistakable American warnings, the NLF/DRV embarked upon a policy which on the surface seemed designed to provoke the United

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<sup>63</sup>C. M. Clifford, "A Viet Nam Reappraisal: The Personal History of One Man's View and How it Evolved," in Foreign Affairs, July 1969.

<sup>64</sup>New York Times, January 28, 1964.

<sup>65</sup>Fall and Raskin, The Vietnam Reader, p. 395.





States. The terrorist attacks aimed specifically at causing US casualties, such as the Christmas Eve, 1964 bombing of a Saigon restaurant frequented by American servicemen (two killed in action, fifty-two US wounded in action) and the 11 February 1965 bombing of the US barracks at Qui Nhan (nineteen US killed in action, thirteen US wounded in action) as well as the several DRV PT boat attacks on US Navy destroyers in International Waters, invited direct US military response. Given the hostile mood of the Johnson Administration and the traditional American insistence on freedom of the seas, the PT boat attacks could hardly have failed to provoke the violent reaction which followed those engagements.

What prompted these NLF/DRV tactics? Why, for instance, did the NLF and the DRV not concentrate exclusively on the collapsing RVN and purposely exclude US personnel as specific targets rather than singling out Americans? It is entirely possible the DRV leadership did not believe the US would decisively intervene. In 1954 there had been some very bellicose statements threatening US military action to save a traditional, white, European ally which had never been translated into action in spite of the humiliation of an ally surely more significant and valued than Nguyen Cao Ky's South Vietnam. Since the 1954 settlement the DRV had consistently identified the US as its principal enemy, claiming the surest way to destroy the US puppet regime in South Vietnam was to defeat the United States. DRV political judgment, over a period of years, could conceivably been effected by statements such as:

...our people clearly realize that imperialist gangs never can bear to negotiate...no matter how much they lose...on the battlefield. Revolutionary people who want victory...must first of all win a victory on the battlefield...



During the current phase the immediate real foes of the people in the South are the American imperialists.<sup>66</sup>

Whether victims of their own propaganda or through a lack of understanding of the difficulties any U.S. Administration would face in committing American ground forces to an Asian War without the severest provocation, the DRV proceeded to supply the provocative action which led to the direct U.S. involvement. The 2 and 4 August, 1964, PT boat attacks on U.S. destroyers patrolling the Tonkin Gulf prompted the first direct American retaliatory military action against the DRV.<sup>67</sup> However, even more important than the retaliatory air strikes was the joint Resolution of Congress that these attacks in international waters prompted. With no significant debate the Congress authorized the President to take virtually any step he alone considered necessary in a vast and troubled area:

...as the President determines, to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to assist any member or protocol state of the South East Asia Collective Defense Treaty requesting assistance in the defense of its freedom.<sup>68</sup>

This resolution, which was passed 88-2 in the Senate and 416-0 in the House, quite suddenly granted prior Congressional approval to any Presidential commitment of U.S. national forces to the Vietnam War. Even without this specific resolution it is entirely probable that U.S. forces would have been dispatched to Vietnam to prevent a Communist victory. However, the

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<sup>66</sup>"Hoc Tap," July, 1964 in Joint Publication Research Service 25981 1964, p. 21.

<sup>67</sup>New York Times, August 5, 1964, p. 1.

<sup>68</sup>Council of Foreign Relations, Documents of American Foreign Relations: 1964, pp. 216-217.



attacks on U.S. Navy vessels on the high seas galvanized the U.S. Congress and foreclosed debate on a resolution which under almost any other circumstances would have encountered strong opposition. It almost certainly would have been amended to make it less of a pre-given rubber stamp approval of Congress' right to declare war. As the resolution stands, the President can take any action, including the use of armed force, which he determines necessary to protect South Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, Great Britain, France, Australia or New Zealand. This resolution is then, in effect, a global blank check with staggering implications: even as we debate withdrawal from the quagmire of Vietnam, the President retains prior Congressional approval to intervene, to combat subversion or defend against aggression, if invited by the host state, in, for instance, Laos or even Great Britain to help the British quell "subversion" in Northern Ireland.

President Johnson chose to interpret the resolution as a mandate for direct U.S. intervention and on 7 March 1965. The one thing which could prevent DRV/NLF control of South Vietnam began with the commitment of 3,500 Marines, the first American ground elements, to the Vietnam War.<sup>69</sup> With this first step taken the U.S. troop commitment rapidly expanded to eleven divisions, numerous independent brigades and regiments and supporting arms.<sup>70</sup>

The nightmare had become reality. The involvement in a major Asian land war advised against by so many eminent American military officers was a fact. Almost as soon as the first American troops waded ashore from the U.S. Seventh Fleet ships the United States began looking for a way out of a war

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<sup>69</sup>New York Times, March 8, 1965, p. 1.

<sup>70</sup>New York Times, various.



which had caught the U.S. in the throes of a dilemma so aptly described by Walter Lippmann as a choice between "an unattainable victory and unacceptable defeat."<sup>71</sup> The DRV's decision to commit People's Army of Vietnam units and lend large scale logistic support to assist in the "liberation" of South Vietnam was in direct opposition to the American determination to maintain the independence of the Republic of Vietnam. This basic conflict of interest has led through escalation and counter-escalation to the massive struggle of today.





## II

### EARLY PERSPECTIVES

There are essentially six principals deciding the fate of South Vietnam: the four belligerents (the United States, the Republic of Vietnam, the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam, and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam) plus the two main supporters of the DRV: the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. The resolution of a war through diplomatic channels under what might be called ordinary circumstances of belligerency has always been a most difficult task. By definition, war is the continuation of national foreign policy by armed force after failure to achieve national objectives by other means. Attempts to solve a conflict through diplomatic channels is therefore a return to a method which had previously failed. In Vietnam this inherent difficulty is compounded by additional contradictions. Neither the RVN/US nor the NLF/DRV has been able to achieve the convincing military ascendancy necessary to make the other side view concessions on key issues, which could make a negotiated settlement possible, as preferable to continued fighting which might lead to a wholly unfavorable resolution on the battlefield.

In addition to belligerency status, the U.S., as the so called Free World Leader, is in world wide competition with both the Soviet Union and Communist China for influence in other nations. The U.S. is committed to a containment policy of these two countries which the U.S. has judged as aggressive and hostile; whose expansion would jeopardize American National security. The Soviet Union and CPR are, on the other hand, engaged in the previously mentioned competition with the U.S. to replace American or Western influence with Soviet or Chinese influence. Perhaps more significantly the



Soviet Union and CPR are vying for leadership ascendancy within the Communist World. This struggle has produced vicious political in-fighting, name calling and recently armed clashes on the Sino-Soviet frontier. In that battle for influence, Vietnam has become a pawn used by each side in attempts to justify either the Soviet or Chinese interpretation of the Marxist doctrine.

The U.S. has assumed a pivotal position in the struggle for influence. Since the mid-1950's the Soviet Union has been the champion of peaceful coexistence<sup>1</sup> with direct competition and confrontation with the U.S. limited to the sphere of economics because thermonuclear war is obviously suicidal for both the super powers. China, on the other hand, has advocated the expansion of communism into Western dominated or Third World areas through people's wars of national liberation. An aggressive, high risk, anti-American foreign policy has been championed by the CPR as the best way to overcome U.S. influence. It is important to note that this high risk policy is to be conducted by the Soviet Union, the Communist super power, and not by the CPR.

The application of U.S. military power against a bloc country produced policy modifications by both China and the Soviet Union: the Soviets, because the U.S. was not peacefully coexisting, and China because the use of

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<sup>1</sup>In his celebrated "secret speech" Nikita S. Khrushchev at the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in February 1956 in which Khrushchev not only denounced the crimes committed by the Stalin regime, but also made some significant changes in Soviet Foreign Policy. First, while affirming the irreconcilability of communism and capitalism, Khrushchev maintained that war was no longer inevitable. The change in the balance of world power, he asserted, made it possible for communism to maintain the world peace while still thwarting the "schemes of the war-makers." The Foreign Policy of the Soviet Union, edited, with introductions and notes, by Alvin Z. Rubinstein (New York, N.Y.: Random House, 1966) pp. 282-84.



U.S. power so close to China could easily spread to China itself if Chinese support for or association with the DRV/NLF became too direct or open. Thus both China and the Soviet Union were forced by U.S. intervention to modify their foreign policy while at the same time struggling for ascendancy within the Communist Orb and Third World.

The frame work for competition, how best to defeat the U.S., has produced, with the advent of U.S. intervention, an interesting anomaly which will be investigated in Chapter III. Specifically the Soviets champion peaceful coexistence and the settlement of differences by negotiations, yet in Vietnam, are the prime suppliers of war material to the DRV and call for a "united front" to defend the DRV. China, on the other hand, in the ideological struggle, advocates a high risk foreign policy without regard to the possibility of nuclear warfare, yet in Vietnam has made only limited contributions to the defense of the DRV, has spurned the Soviet call for a "united front" and has been most cautious in dealing with the United States in Vietnam.

Before analyzing the prospects for peace in Vietnam, the basic policy objectives of each of the six principals, as well as what each party considers to be obstacles to peace in Vietnam must be identified. The recent history of Vietnam will be viewed through different refracting lenses in Saigon, Washington, Moscow, Peking, Hanoi and the jungle hideout of the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam.

#### The National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam

The insurgency in the South following the First Indochina War grew and received support from two sources. The first source was from the people in



South Vietnam. In the effort to round up the 5,000 or so active Vietminh "stay-behinds" the Diem regime had resorted to quasi-legal and arbitrary proceedings aimed principally at all former Vietminh regardless of affiliation with the "stay-behinds." These practices resulted in a de facto violation of the 1954 Geneva Agreements' guarantees prohibiting reprisals against former enemies. For self preservation, many former Vietminh went underground again in the South.<sup>2</sup>

The Vietminh effort to organize an insurgency in South Vietnam was given a powerful boost by the repressive, dictatorial decrees issued by President Diem during 1955 and 1956.<sup>3</sup> Almost daily the population became less identified with the GVN which, instead of appearing as a protector of their best interests, came to symbolize a corrupt and dictatorial regime. The jails were overflowing with non-Communist dissenters, whole army corps were stationed around Saigon not to protect the city from guerrilla attack but rather to protect Diem from a coup, and the land reform program was not effectively distributing the land to the peasants. In such an atmosphere, insurgency was bound to flourish if provided with dynamic leadership. Such leadership was available in the "stay-behinds" and in former Vietminh driven by Diem into the insurgent's camp.

Preying on the very real deficiencies of the Diem regime, the Vietminh was able to significantly increase their numbers from several thousand in 1955 to tens of thousands in 1959.<sup>4</sup> The exigencies of combat, the dangers

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<sup>2</sup>B. B. Fall, "How the French Got Out of Vietnam," in Fall and Raskin, The Vietnam Reader, p. 91.

<sup>3</sup>Don R. and Arthur Larson, "What is Our 'Commitment' in Vietnam?", in Fall and Raskin, The Vietnam Reader, p. 106.

<sup>4</sup>Department of State, A Threat to Peace, pp. 49-51.





of daily life and similar ideological goals welded the guerrillas into a tight-knit group whose bonds have been tempered in the heat of battle. Such bonds, once formed, are almost unbreakable. The compelling ties are illustrated in a diary captured during the First Indochina War from the body of Nguyen Binh, a popular Vietminh commander in South Vietnam:

I had reached the stage where the only alternatives were to yield and do what was asked of me, thus ensuring my own destruction and the victory of the Party, or else to resist, going over to Bao Dai. But if I had changed sides I could never have persuaded myself that I had not been a traitor. It would have been treachery towards my comrades in the Resistance, the living and the dead...I belong on their side, and on their side I stay; for a battle fought together for years supplies the place of conviction.<sup>5</sup>

When writing this, Binh seems to have been aware that Le Duan--now First Secretary of the Lao Dong, Communist Party of Vietnam, but in the early 1950's responsible for the purges of Southern Party members--had been sent from North Vietnam to liquidate Binh and remove a possible rival to the DRV developing in North Vietnam.<sup>6</sup> Yet the comradeship between Binh and his men was so strong that he could not defect. Shortly after this diary entry Binh was betrayed by Le Duan to a French commanded Cambodian light infantry patrol and was shot to death.<sup>7</sup>

The second source of support was from the DRV which has provided arms, munitions, manpower and leadership.<sup>8</sup> In December of 1960 the National Front

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<sup>5</sup>Richard Critchfield, *The Long Charade: Political Subversion in Vietnam* (New York, N.Y.: Brace & World Inc., 1968) p. 46.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid*, p. 46.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid*, pp. 45-47.

<sup>8</sup>The International Supervision and Control Commission finding of 2 June 1962 with Canada and India voting for and Poland against that there was



for the Liberation of South Vietnam was formed. Following its formation the NLF published their Program on 20 December 1960. The essential features of that program are:

... Overthrow the camouflaged colonial regime of the American imperialists...institute a government of national democratic union...Institute a largely liberal and democratic regime based on universal suffrage.

...Establish an independent and sovereign economy, and improve the living conditions of the people... implement agrarian reform with the aim of providing land for the tillers...

... Reestablish normal relations between the two zones and prepare for peaceful reunification of the country...Struggle against all aggressive war and defend universal peace...<sup>9</sup>

The NLF is formed around the People's Revolutionary Party which is in fact the Southern branch of the Lao Dong Party (the Communist Party of North Vietnam.) A secret Lao Dong circular dated 7 December 1961 informed party members that the People's Revolutionary Party was independent in name only and was actually the Southern branch of the Lao Dong Party which was unified from North to South.<sup>10</sup>

Under Le Duan's careful tutelage the NLF built the base for protracted struggle in the South. The Communist infrastructure was established village by village. The guerrillas closely identified themselves with the peasants

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"sufficient evidence to show beyond a reasonable doubt" that the People's Army of Vietnam was permitting North Vietnam to be used as a base for offensive operations designed to overthrow the government of South Vietnam cited in Department of State, Aggression from the North, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup>American Friends Service Committee, Peace in Vietnam, Appendix II.

<sup>10</sup>The prepared statement of Secretary of State Dean Rusk in testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on February 1966 cited in The Vietnam Hearings, edited with introductory notes by Senator J. W. Fulbright (New York, N.Y.: Random House, 1967) p.



who in turn supplied the guerrillas with food and more important, intelligence. By the early 1960's the struggle in South Vietnam was in the second phase of Giap's outline for guerrilla warfare. Le Duan's future is intricately tied to the fortunes of the Southern insurgency. He has taken credit for the NLF successes. Likewise he must shoulder the responsibility if his project should fail.

Events following the assassination of Diem prompted a major shift in the tactics of the revolution. The confusion and political in-fighting in South Vietnam appeared to offer the opportunity of a rapid solution to the war. In contravention to Giap's and Mao's theories of guerrilla warfare, the struggle in South Vietnam was upgrade to Phase III,<sup>11</sup> or a

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<sup>11</sup>General Giap's theoretical treatment of people's wars is in agreement with Mao's view that the guerrilla resorts to "conventional war of maneuver" to annihilate the enemy only after the balance of power has shifted in favor of the guerrillas. When that condition has been met the guerrilla units are formed into conventional military formations and the enemy is engaged in conventional set-piece battles and annihilated by superior guerrilla firepower. Prior to the shift in the balance of power the guerrillas, in Phase II, engage the enemy only in carefully planned attacks where, through concentration of forces the guerrilla unit achieves local fire superiority. The enemy unit is rapidly destroyed and the guerrilla units withdraw and disperse immediately to prevent their own annihilation when superior enemy reinforcements arrive.

With the introduction of U.S. elements in 1965 the balance of power shifted away from the NLF. The key issue in Hanoi and South Vietnam was whether to return to Phase II or continue in Phase III in spite of the U.S. manpower and firepower superiority. Le Duan was the leading spokesman in Hanoi for the strategy of continuation of the war of maneuver and offensive tactics. Answering Lin Piao's call for a strategic retreat in the face of the superior American strength Le Duan said on 26 July 1966, "We cannot automatically apply the evolutionary experiences of other countries in our own country.... It is not fortuitous that in the history of our country, each time we rose up to oppose foreign aggression, we took the offensive and not the defensive.... Taking the offensive is a strategy while taking the defensive is only a stratagem. Since the day the South Vietnamese people rose up. they have continually taken the offensive." Cited in D. S. Zagoria, The Vietnam Triangle: Moscow, Peking, Hanoi (New York, N.Y.: Pegasus, 1967) p. 84. In





conventional war of maneuver, to annihilate the GVN. The careful guerrilla ground work was pushed into the background as NVA and NLF elements shifted to large scale military operations.<sup>12</sup> In this shift of tactics, Le Duan took a great risk since to support the expanded effort, guerrillas would be forced to increase taxes and conscript, for the first time, guerrilla fighters in large numbers. These measures were bound to alienate the population they had won over. Therefore, if the guerrillas were not quickly successful, the shift to Phase III could prove disastrous to their carefully developed infrastructure. As we have already seen, this move, although initially successful, led to the massive United States intervention in the Spring of 1965.

As long as American troops remain in Vietnam it is probably not possible for the NLF to achieve their objective of overthrowing the Government of South Vietnam. Out of necessity the initial objective of the NLF changed in 1965 from the overthrow of the GVN to the withdrawal of American units which would facilitate achievement of the primary goal of overthrow of the GVN. The new NLF position was outlined to an American professor, R. S. Browne, and a French journalist, Georges Chaffard, who visited NLF leaders shortly after the American intervention. Browne reported the NLF goals as:

1. An immediate cease fire, with a freezing of the current military situation.
2. Adjudication by an international body in districts where control is in dispute.
3. U.S. preparation and execution of a withdrawal of all American and puppet (meaning all other non-ARVN units in South Vietnam) troops over a six month period.

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other words counter to the advice from their Chinese allies the DRV intended to remain on the offensive against the Americans. This strategy called for a continued offensive, regardless of the superior U.S. firepower, as the "correct" method for defeating the U.S. and their puppets.

<sup>12</sup>Critchfield, The Long Charade, p. 54.





4. District by district elections from which a coalition government could emerge.<sup>13</sup>

Chaffard received a lengthy interview with Huyn Than Phat, Vice President of the NLF, which he reported on in the 25 April 1965 issue of L'Express:

Our first task will be to rebuild the economy of South Vietnam. For that we will need... foreign economic aid... To get aid from Western countries we will have to follow a policy of neutrality. We know the capitalists. They will want guarantees. We are realists. Even United States aid will be welcome...

We will not even approach the problem of unification for a very long time... When the time comes for unification it will take place on a basis precluding annexation of one zone by another.<sup>14</sup>

There are in these statements two important deviations from previous NLF stands regarding acceptable solutions to the war in South Vietnam. For the first time a coalition government is mentioned as a means of settlement. Although a true coalition government with the Ky leadership of the Republic of Vietnam would hardly have been acceptable to the NLF, the very idea that the NLF might be willing to include non-NLF members in a coalition government was a significant shift in position. The second was Phat's statements concerning eventual unification contained the concept of an independent, at least for a period of years, South Vietnam which would be a neutral state. This does not necessarily mean the NLF was, at that time, abandoning the ultimate objective of eventual unification. Rather, the NLF leadership was bending to the military realities. As long as the U.S. remained actively engaged an NLF military victory was and is unlikely. Therefore the surest way to political victory was through concessions to the U.S. sensibilities. It was among the first indications that the NLF could show signs of true

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<sup>13</sup>Critchfield, The Long Charade, p. 54.

<sup>14</sup>L'Express, 25 April 1965.



independence from North Vietnam and that the NLF leadership might reserve the right to decide what was in the best interests of the NLF's southern membership.

Democratic Republic  
of Vietnam

The Leadership of the DRV has traditionally regarded Vietnam as a single country temporarily divided into Northern and Southern zones by external forces. In March of 1955, following the ratification of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, Ho Chi Minh objected that the Treaty was aimed specifically at violating the Geneva Agreements with regard to unification:

In the Orient, the American imperialists...organize the Southeast Treaty Organization aiming at sabotaging the Geneva Agreements and the peace in Southeast Asia.<sup>15</sup>

Three months later on 5 June 1955 Ho Chi Minh reiterated the basic DRV belief that Vietnam was a single country:

Vietnam is one. The Vietnamese nation is one. No force can divide them. Whoever tries to partition Vietnam is the enemy of the Vietnamese people and will surely be defeated.<sup>16</sup>

When Diem refused to permit the unification elections called for in the Final Declaration of the Geneva Conference in 1954 the DRV, at first, confined itself to verbal assaults on the Diem regime. However, as the indigenous southern insurgency gained momentum the DRV sought to assume the mantle of leadership and support became more open and obvious. General Nguyen Vo Giap, Defense Minister and Commander-in-Chief of the North Vietnamese armed forces, explained in 1960 the role that the DRV was playing in the revolution:

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<sup>15</sup> Cole, Conflict in Indochina, p. 243.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 209.



The North has become a large rear-echelon of our army...the North is the revolutionary base for the entire country.<sup>17</sup>

"Our army" pointedly refers to the southern insurgents and such phraseology indicates continuing DRV belief in a single, unified Vietnam and the extent to which the DRV is tied to the war in the South.

Although admitting to supporting the southern insurgency, the DRV has never acknowledged the presence in South Vietnam of anything other than "Vietnamese" forces. Since Vietnam is one, there is, in DRV lexicon, no difference between NLF and NVA elements. The differences exist only between Vietnamese people and "puppet" troops.

The DRV is committed to the unification of Vietnam under DRV control. That was the objective in 1954, it was the objective in 1960 and 1965 and it is still the objective today. In the DRV's so called Four Point Plan for peace in Vietnam, the subject of unification is mentioned in three of the four points, which is an indication of the importance attached to that subject in Hanoi. On 8 April 1965 Premier Phan Van Dong established the North Vietnamese negotiating position after the introduction of American combat elements:

1. Recognition of the basic national rights of the Vietnamese people --peace, independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity...the United States...must withdraw from South Vietnam all...troops, military personnel and weapons of all kinds, dismantle all United States military bases...stop its acts of war against North Vietnam.
2. Pending the peaceful unification...the military provisions of the 1954 Geneva Agreements...must be strictly respected...
3. The internal affairs of South Vietnam must be settled by the South Vietnamese people themselves, in accordance with the program of the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam without any foreign interference.

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<sup>17</sup>Hoc Tap (Hanoi, DRV), January 1960, p. 3.





4. The peaceful reunification of Vietnam is to be settled by the Vietnamese people without any foreign interference.<sup>18</sup>

It is important to note that in point three the problems in South Vietnam must be solved in accordance with the NLF's program, the first point of which calls for the overthrow of the Government of South Vietnam, while other elements define unification as inherent in each point. Taken together with the demand for United States withdrawal as a pre-condition to peace in South Vietnam the Four Point proposal is an uncompromising stand, offering little room for fruitful negotiations. Since US troops were introduced to save the Government of Vietnam and their withdrawal in 1965, 1966, or 1967 would probably have led to a DRV/NLF victory, United States withdrawal was most unlikely. Such a victory was viewed as totally unsatisfactory in Washington. There would have to be some fundamental position changes if the US and DRV were to talk peace.

#### The Republic of Vietnam

The RVN has, since Geneva 1954, had an almost pathological fear of being absorbed by the DRV. The RVN refused to become party to the Final Declaration fearing the grater voter appeal of Ho Chi Minh would result in DRV control of the South. In response to a call by the DRV for consultations on the 1956 unification elections Diem made clear the RVN view of unification:

We did not sign the Geneva Agreements...but it is out of the question to consider any proposal from the Vietminh if proof is not given that they put the superior interests of the National Community above those of Communism.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>New York Times, 14 August 1965, p. 3.

<sup>19</sup>Cole, Conflict in Indochina, pp. 226-227.



In other words, as far as Diem was concerned, there would be no elections as long as the North was under Communist control.

The first point of the NLF's program and the third point of the DRV's peace formula calling for the replacement of the GVN are obviously unsatisfactory to the RVN. The RVN has, until the very recent past, been totally unwilling to deal with those it considered as aggressing against the nation state of South Vietnam; the NLF because it was attempting by force of arms to overthrow the government of South Vietnam and the DRV because they were aiding, assisting and abetting the NLF in the attempted overthrow and since 1961 has been infiltrating North Vietnam Army units to assist in the destruction of the GVN. This natural hesitancy was augmented by the fact that the newly installed military government of Nguyen Cao Ky had no political base in the democratic sense of the word. His political foundation was built on anti-Communist army support. To have agreed to meet with the NLF or the DRV to discuss their grievances at that time would have appeared as a reward for aggression and equally important, probably would have resulted in an anti-Ky coup. Furthermore, the country-wide military situation in 1965, which was desperate, would have placed the GVN at a disadvantage in any negotiations. Thus, the RVN stand was that there could be no negotiations as long as the NLF remained armed and the NVA was present in South Vietnam. Rather, the RVN would fight and defeat that aggression:

We must defeat the Viet Cong and those illegally fighting with them on our soil. We are the victims of an aggression directed and supported from Hanoi...the defeat of that aggression is vital for the future of our people of South Vietnam.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Joint U.S.-RVN Communique at the conclusion of the Honolulu Conference, New York Times, 2 September 1966, p. 16.



### The United States of America

The United States has long viewed Southeast Asia as an area of vast strategic importance. It is an area rich in natural resources with a commanding position athwart the East-West lines of communication between the Orient and Europe and between the West Coast of the Americas and India and the East Coast of Africa. Should Communist China or any single nation dominate this vast strategic region the balance of power in the Pacific and perhaps the world could be upset. The tremendous natural wealth of Southeast Asia could compensate for the resource deficiency within China facilitating a tremendous expansion of the CPR economy. The importance of the area to the United States is illustrated by the fact that many consider it directly responsible for the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.<sup>21</sup>

In the background of the Vietnamese conflict the U.S. has seen the CPR lurking and plotting the eventual control of all of Southeast Asia. This American concern was voiced by the then Secretary of Defense McNamara in an address in Washington on 26 March 1964:

For Peking, however, Hanoi's victory would be only a first step toward eventual Chinese hegemony over the two Vietnams and Southeast Asia, and towards exploitation of the new strategy, conquest by wars of national liberation, in other parts of the world.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>The U.S., to prevent Japanese expansion in this direction, imposed a series of economic sanctions on American exports to Japan, especially petroleum products. The Japanese deprived of their major source of petroleum needed a secure source in order to continue their war against China. To gain that source the Japanese Fleet struck the American Fleet at Pearl Harbor to eliminate American Naval power in the Pacific and permit Japanese expansion into the Southeast Asian area, which is rich in natural resources, and particularly the oil fields in the Indonesian Archipelago.

<sup>22</sup>R. S. McNamara, "In Response to Aggression," in Fall and Raskin, The Vietnam Reader, p. 197.



Another underlying concern is that should this war of national liberation in Vietnam prove successful--if the free world forces were defeated--that it might become the model for Communist, particularly, Chinese expansion elsewhere. Thus the long shadow of possible CPR ambitions falls upon Vietnam and is articulated later in the same speech:

...Peking thus appears to feel that it has a large stake in demonstrating the new strategy, using Vietnam as a test case. Success in Vietnam would be regarded by Peking as vindication for China's views in the world-wide ideological struggle.<sup>23</sup>

That one of the United States' objectives in Vietnam was the defeat of the national wars of liberation strategy was clearly implied in that speech. Subsequent statements by President Johnson reinforced that interpretation.

In the deepening Vietnam crisis of the early 1960's, President Kennedy set into motion events which would make eventual direct American involvement if not inevitable, at least likely. The number of U.S. advisors to the ARVN was step by step increased from 689 in 1960 to approximately 10,000 in 1962.<sup>24</sup> While U.S. units were not technically engaged in the war, the already massive U.S. military commitment made withdrawal from the battle without a tremendous, perhaps crippling, blow to national pride and international confidence in the world wide U.S. security guarantees almost impossible. President Kennedy committed additional American military manpower specifically to prevent a Communist victory in South Vietnam:

The United States for more than a decade has been assisting the Government and people of Vietnam to maintain their independence...Article IV (SEATO) stated that the United States recognized that aggression

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid, p. 195.

<sup>24</sup>Associated Press Release of 24 May 1969 appearing in the Seattle Times, 26 May 1969, p. A-1.





by means of armed attack against Vietnam could threaten our own security...We are attempting to prevent a Communist take-over in Vietnam...<sup>25</sup>

This statement invoking Article IV of the SEATO Pact affirmed the fact that the United States considered the SEATO Pact binding in the case of Vietnam.

As we have seen the military and political situation in South Vietnam had become, by the early spring of 1965, desperate. The only action which could prevent a Communist, or if you prefer NLF/DRV, victory in the South within a very short period of time was the commitment of substantial U.S. combat elements. As difficult as it might be at this date to imagine, the vast majority of Americans, in 1965, approved President Johnson's approach to the solution of the problems in Southeast Asia.<sup>26</sup> While the prospects of war are never well received in the United States, an unconditional withdrawal or failure to prevent a Communist takeover in Vietnam would have been at variance with the tempo of the times.

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<sup>25</sup> From the text of President J. F. Kennedy's 13 February 1962 news conference, published in full in the New York Times, 14 February 1962, p. 14.

<sup>26</sup> On a variety of questions the national public opinion polls indicated, in late 1964 and 1965, general support for U.S. Vietnam policy while rejecting the calls for unilateral American withdrawal. 83% of the electorate approved of the retaliatory air strikes against North Vietnam following the attacks on the American destroyers in the Tonkin Gulf in August of 1964; New York Times, 23 February 1965, p. 9. The same poll indicated that the American public felt that a U.S. withdrawal would lead to a Communist victory in Vietnam with only 17% disagreeing. Just after President Johnson's Johns Hopkins Speech committing American combat elements to the war, 57% of the public polled supported the President's policy and handling of the war; New York Times, 27 April 1965, p. 1. When the President upped the ceiling of American troops in Vietnam to over 125,000 in July 1965 the new ceiling was considered less than the public was prepared to accept at least as indicated by the New York Times' poll published in the New York Times, 30 July 1965, p. 1.



On April 7, 1965 President Johnson explained why Americans were fighting in his first major policy speech following the commitment of U.S. combat elements to the struggle:

We fight because we must fight if we are to live in a world where every country can shape its own destiny, and only in such a world will our own freedom be finally secure...

Of course, some of the people of South Vietnam are participating in the attack on their own government. But trained men and supplies, orders and arms, flow in a constant stream from North to South...

We are also there to strengthen world order. Around the globe...are people whose well being rests in part on the belief that they can count on us if they are attacked. To leave Vietnam to its fate would shake the confidence of all these people in the value of America's word. The result would be increased unrest and instability, and even wider war.

After having discussed the reasons for the American involvement, the President then went on to outline the U.S. objectives in Vietnam:

Our objective is the independence of South Viet-Nam and its freedom from attack. We want nothing for ourselves--only that the people of South Viet-Name be allowed to guide their own country in their own way...

And we do this to convince the leaders of North Vietnam--securely and all who seek to share their conquest--of a simple fact:

We will not be defeated.

We will not grow tired.

We will not withdraw, either openly or under the cloak of a meaningless agreement.

Such peace demands an independent South Vietnam--securely guaranteed and able to shape its own relationships to all others--free from outside interference--tied to no alliance--a military base for no other country.<sup>27</sup>

Quite plainly, President Johnson defined the American objective in Vietnam as the independence of South Vietnam and the guaranteed freedom of that country from outside attack. This American determination to preserve

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<sup>27</sup> New York Times, 8 April 1965, p. 16.



the independence of South Vietnam was in direct conflict with the principal objective of the DRV, namely the reunification of Vietnam and the NLF's goal of overthrowing the GVN. Given the basic conflict of interest on the central issues the prospects for peace were, during the static political period from March 1965 to February 1968, dim.

#### The 1954 and 1962 Geneva Agreements

The breakdown of the two previous agreements for peace in Southeast Asia will have an effect on all the parties concerned in any attempt to reach a negotiated settlement of the present conflict.

Failure of the United States and the State of Vietnam to consent to the 1954 Agreements was a powerful stimulus towards disorder. The subsequent American encouragement of Diem not to permit the unification elections called for in the unsigned Final Declaration to the 1954 Conference could be considered a major cause of the Second Indochina War. Barring the elections removed any chance of peaceful unification of Vietnam. Since the DRV has always viewed Vietnam as a single entity and was determined to have a united Vietnam, force would, in the end, be attempted as the unification device.

The inability of any of the signatories or the International Commission for the Supervision and Control to compel compliance with either the 1954 or the 1962 Agreement tends to discredit negotiated settlements in this area. Some of the major violations are:

- a. The 1956 South Vietnamese refusal to permit unification elections as called for in the Final Declaration of the 1954 Agreements.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> President Diem's statement regarding country-wide elections between the two zones in Vietnam cited in Cole, Conflict in Indochina, p. 226-227.



- b. In March 1957 the Diem regime openly violated the last restraints still in effect from the 1954 Agreements with the initiations of a program of reprisals against "former resistance members" that is, former Vietminh.<sup>29</sup>
- c. The 2 June ICC finding that North Vietnam was sending arms, munitions and men to fight in South Vietnam, and that the People's Army of Vietnam (NVA) had allowed the DRV to be used for the purpose of overthrowing the government in South Vietnam.<sup>30</sup>
- d. Article II of the 1962 Agreements calls for "all foreign troops, foreign regular and irregular troops, foreign para-military formations and foreign military personnel" to be withdrawn from Laos within 30 days. This has not been accomplished. Of the thousands of North Vietnamese troops in Laos at the time of agreement, less than 100 checked out of the country at the official ICC check points and by July 1966 there were an estimated 40,000 NVA troops in Laos.<sup>31</sup>

In all of these cases the ICC was without the requisite military or political power or recourse to sufficient power to force observance of the Agreements. Peace under the 1954 and 1962 Agreements was wholly dependent on the good will and voluntary compliance of the principles. The ICC was and is completely powerless to enforce the Agreements. The Commission can simply report the most flagrant violations to those who already know of the violations: the perpetrator and the victim. The effect of world opinion as a deterrent to violation has, in Southeast Asia, proved to be valueless.

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<sup>29</sup>B. B. Fall, "Viet Cong--The Unseen Enemy in Vietnam," in Fall and Raskin, The Vietnam Reader, p. 255.

<sup>30</sup>Department of State, Aggression from the North, p. 30.

<sup>31</sup>P. F. Langer and J. J. Zasloff, The North Vietnamese Military Advisor in Laos: A First Hand Account (Santa Monica, Calif.: Rand Corporation, 1968). This theme is developed throughout this short Rand Memorandum.





### III

#### MOSCOW AND THE WAR

Complicating an already complex issue is the fact that the Vietnam War plays a central role in the Sino-Soviet rift. The war has become a pawn in the chess game being played by China and the Soviets for leadership within the Communist World. Each is trying to establish the "correctness" of its own ideology and strategy.

In January 1961 Nikita Khrushchev, while reaffirming the Soviet policy of "peaceful coexistence" said the Soviets would, as well, support "just wars of national liberation":

...liberation wars will continue to exist as long as imperialism exists...Such wars are not only admissible but inevitable, since the colonialists do not grant independence voluntarily...It is a liberation war of a people for its independence, it is a sacred war. We recognize such wars, we help and will help the peoples striving for their independence...<sup>1</sup>

The Soviets have placed the greater emphasis on the peaceful coexistence phase in their foreign policy or, actually it would be more correct to say, they have placed less emphasis on the wars of national liberation than the CPR has.

While the Soviets have maintained that revolution by armed force is not always necessary, Mao has held that in the last analysis force will always have to be used to complete the revolution. To support this thesis the CPR published the text of a secret memorandum they had sent to the Soviets concerning the Soviet thesis that parliamentary seizure was preferable to the open use of force:

It is advantageous from the point of view of tactics to refer to the desire for peaceful transition (of a Communist party to power). But...they must be

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<sup>1</sup>Critchfield, The Long Charade, p. 51, citing a speech made by the Soviet leader, Nikita S. Khrushchev, in January, 1961.



prepared at all times to repulse counter-revolutionary attacks and, at the critical juncture of the revolution when the working class is seizing state power, to overthrow the bourgeoisie by armed force if it uses armed force to suppress the people's revolution: generally speaking, it is inevitable that the bourgeoisie will do so.<sup>2</sup>

The intended message was clear: that the advocacy of the peaceful transition to power could be used only as a ploy to deceive the bourgeoisie but in actually seizing power the Communists would have to resort to armed force.

The CPR has long been the most outspoken advocate of the people's wars of national liberation as the best means of expanding the Communist area of domination. The people's wars offer the means for a less powerful adversary, with little or no risk to the Communist government supporting the insurgency, to overthrow non-Communist governments.

While the Vietnam War remained a localized affair only indirectly involving the United States both the CPR and the Soviet Union could pay lip service to the NLF and "support" the war of liberation being fought in South Vietnam. There was no apparent danger of being called upon to deliver actual or material assistance to the insurgents. However, this complacency was shattered when, in August 1964, the United States initiated retaliatory air strikes against North Vietnam in retribution for the North Vietnamese PT boat attacks on American destroyers in the Tonkin Gulf. These air strikes demonstrated an alarming (at least to the Soviets and the CPR) American willingness to use armed force and, in particular, a U.S. willingness to assault the guerrilla's privileged sanctuary which had, heretofore been inviolate. Quite suddenly the war in Vietnam was no longer one which Moscow

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid, p. 51-52, citing the text of a CPR governmental news release.



and Peking could, willy-nilly, support without any real obligations to produce some visible assistance for North Vietnam and the southern insurgents.

Those air attacks were the source of acute embarrassment on the part of the Soviets since, as the leader of the socialist camp they have the same obligation to defend their fold as the United States does in the Free World. The Soviets had no intention of directly confronting the U.S. in Vietnam; yet, barring that course, how could they prevent the devastation of North Vietnam by aerial assault? They could attempt to influence the U.S. to halt the bombing and talk peace, try to persuade the DRV to enter negotiations while still under attack or find some mutually agreeable middle ground between the two.

The gravity of the situation can be measured indirectly by the Soviet response to the invitation of the DRV to the UN following the Tonkin Gulf attacks. Rather than assaulting the U.S. in a propaganda broadside the Soviets maintained a measured silence while supporting the DRV.<sup>3</sup> While the DRV refused to come and proclaimed that only the signatories to the 1954 Geneva Agreements could decide the fate of Southeast Asia,<sup>4</sup> it is of considerable significance that the Soviets were attempting, even at this early date, to remove the struggle from the explosive battlefield environment to the conference table.

In any efforts to arrange or even to acquiesce to a negotiated settlement in Vietnam the USSR must tread a very thin line between supporting and assisting a fellow socialist state under direct American attack and pressuring the DRV to accept some sort of negotiated settlement. Since the

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<sup>3</sup>New York Times, 8 August 1964, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid, 10 August 1964, p. 1.



Sino-Soviet rift is basically over means not ends, the Soviets cannot afford to appear to be supporting the American position or to be lagging the CPR in support of a beleaguered socialist state. To do so would jeopardize the already threatened Soviet leadership position in the Communist World. Thus the Soviets have developed a parallel approach to the Vietnamese War. On the one hand the Soviet Union has become the primary supplier of war material to the North Vietnamese, especially sophisticated anti-aircraft weapons systems such as air search radar, radar controlled anti-aircraft guns, surface to air missiles, limited numbers of interceptor aircraft and communications and control equipment.<sup>5</sup>

At this point it is illustrative to note that the Soviet shipments of war materials contain mostly weapons for the defense of North Vietnam. The CPR, although supplying less aid, in monetary terms, provides that assistance in the form of infantry weapons such as AK-47 assault rifles, RPG-2 and RPG-7 anti-tank rockets, 57mm and 75mm recoilless rifles, 61mm, 82mm and 120mm and 120mm mortars and large caliber artillery rockets. In other words by supplying air defense weapons systems the Soviets contribute to the defense of North Vietnam while the Chinese support, in a more direct and visible manner, the southern insurgency with large shipments of individual infantry weapons.<sup>6</sup> Even while providing Hanoi with extensive

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid, 28 October 1966, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup>By the end of 1966 Soviet military assistance had built up the DRV air defense system from virtually nothing to an integrated system of over 7,000 anti-aircraft guns, many of which are radar directed, 200 surface to air missile sites equipped with 4,500 missiles, an air force of 120 jet fighters and a coordinated radar surveillance/ communications network for detection, command and control and fighter direction. These figures were made public by Representative Melvin Laird and were read into the Congressional Record





military assistance, the Soviets have attempted to exercise a moderating influence in Hanoi in an effort to get the DRV to reach some agreement with the U.S. which would lead to an American bombing cessation and peace negotiations.

In October of 1966 Moscow called an unscheduled conference to coordinate aid to the DRV. The CPR boycotted this conference but the European Bloc countries and the Soviets agreed to provide Hanoi with \$1 billion in military aid. Of equal importance to the aid itself was the agreement of the attending parties:

...that it would be desirable for Hanoi to go to a peace conference and to make such a conference possible by helping to create the condition that would lead to a halt in the American bombing...<sup>7</sup>

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on 30 March 1967; New York Times, 31 March 1967, p. 3. Harrison Salisbury while visiting North Vietnam learned from foreign diplomats stationed in Hanoi that Soviet supplies were made up almost entirely of heavy armament with attendant munitions, air search and fire direction radar, MIG aircraft, surface to air missile systems with the appropriate electronic equipment, motor transport and petroleum products. The same sources relayed that CPR assistance was generally in the form of construction battalions, food stuffs and light, or infantry, weapons and munitions; New York Times, 17 January 1967, p. 14. In other words the Soviets are the principal suppliers of defensive weapons systems for the protection of North Vietnam while the Chinese are the major suppliers of the NLF's weapons and munitions. The wording of the Soviet-DRV communique at the conclusion of the assistance agreement for 1969 emphasized the civilian character of much of the aid and even the military assistance was that which was "needed for the building up of the defense and strengthening of the economy of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam." New York Times, 28 November 1968, p. 12.

As a personal sidelight, in the one year, from October, 1967 to October 1968, that this writer spent in the Republic of Vietnam as the Chief Staff Officer to Commander, River Assault Squadron Nine and as Commander, River Assault Division Ninety Two, of the tons of enemy equipment the squadron and my division captured in the Mekong Delta every B-40 and B-41 rocket round and launchers, 57mm and 75mm recoilless rifle and projectile, mortar tube and round and AK-47 assault rifle was of Chinese not Soviet manufacture.

<sup>7</sup>New York Times, 28 October 1966, p. 17.



What of course makes this statement significant is the call upon Hanoi to take steps to permit the United States to stop the bombing. Instead of laying all the blame for the expanded war in the American lap, Hanoi is encouraged to share some of the responsibility. Clearly implied is Hanoi could contribute to a peaceful solution by reducing the infiltration rate to South Vietnam since that was the principle, public reason the U.S. gave for the bombing campaign.

The Soviets have been in heavy flak from the CPR for their moderate stance on Vietnam. China has consistently charged that the Soviets were providing insufficient material assistance in comparison to the overall Soviet capability and that the assistance provided has been composed of old and obsolete equipment while at the same time the Soviets were trying to undermine the solidarity of the Vietnamese and Chinese people. This recurring theme is typified by an article in the 24 December 1965 Peking Review:

Whether or not a socialist country firmly supports the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the South Vietnamese National Liberation Front...whether or not it constantly exposes and combats the peace talks scheme of U.S. imperialists...whether or not it genuinely gives the Vietnamese people effective and practical support...constitutes an important criteria...whether it's anti-imperialism is real or sham...

If a person covertly conspires with U.S. imperialism while giving some superficial aid to the Vietnamese people, if he actually sows discord in an attempt to undermine Vietnamese people's unity against U.S. aggression and the unity of Vietnamese and Chinese peoples...while professing...to right imperialism...then he is...capitalizing on the revolutionary cause...for a dirty deal with the United States...<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Peking Review, 24 December 1965, p. 4. Responding to this form of CPR attack the Soviets have not concentrated on U.S. "aggression" in Vietnam but rather have drawn attention to the fact that for all their vocal support of the DRV/NLF the Chinese have consistently evaded more direct involvement to protect North Vietnam from American assaults. This



The low risk policy of avoiding direct confrontation with the U.S. is viewed in Moscow as having the best chance of success in contrast to the high risk, direct US-USSR confrontation policy advocated by the CPR. (It is important to note the CPR high risk policy involves US-USSR and no US-CPR confrontation policy advocated by the CPR.) This Soviet view is more pronounced now that the U.S. is directly involved in the war.

Rather than increasing tensions elsewhere to relive the pressure in Vietnam, as advocated by Peking, the Soviet's "correct" strategy and the one offering the best opportunity for success is to reduce international tensions which will lead to a more permissive American attitude:

...a policy aimed at strengthening world socialism, the active struggle against imperialism...the implementation of the Leninist principle of peaceful co-existence of states with different social systems,... and the securing of a peaceful international atmosphere increase the opportunity for the victorious development of the class struggle...including through national wars of liberation.<sup>9</sup>

When referring to the solution of Southern problems the editorial advocates the South Vietnamese people solve their own problems without mention of the key phraseology "in accordance with the NLF's program." Also while the Vietnamese people will "defend" their just cause there is no bugle call to victory or the defeat of the United States.

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aspect of Chinese inconsistency was commented on in the editorial section of Investia, 21 September 1966, "...on the one hand they try to impose on fraternal parties a course that would lead... ultimately to war... On the other, they remain on the sidelines of the struggle against imperialism... We have not seen any Chinese presence in the Vietnam conflict."

<sup>9</sup>Pravda, 7 December 1966, editorial.



In April 1968, following President Johnson's decision to halt the bombing of the Northern portion of North Vietnam, the Soviets, in direct contrast with the CPR, supported the DRV decision to negotiate:

The Soviet Government fully supports this statement of the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the belief that this indicates a realistic way of ending the war in Vietnam, to a political settlement in the interests of the Vietnamese people.<sup>10</sup>

Although generally supporting the DRV/NLF negotiating stands, the Soviets have shown themselves to be more interested in a settlement than on rigidly applying every aspect of the DRV's and NLF's Four and Five Point demands for a negotiated settlement of the war:

...further development...depends on whether the U.S. will take the following steps: whether it stops bombing unconditionally...whether it takes a positive view of the well known proposals of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam on ways of settling the Vietnamese conflict.<sup>11</sup>

Calling on the U.S. to take a "positive view" of the NLF/DRV proposals implies that, as far as the Soviet Union is concerned, the outright acceptance of those proposals is not necessarily required. Rather, they "offer a good basis for a lasting settlement in Vietnam."<sup>12</sup> The Soviets do not, at any point, say that these proposals form the only basis for agreement.

The most pressing Soviet objective in Vietnam, although through no action directly attributable to the USSR, was achieved on 1 November 1968 when the United States suspended all air and naval bombardment of North Vietnam. Finally, the devastating American attacks against North Vietnam,

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<sup>10</sup>New York Times, 6 April 1968, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid, p. 6.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.







which the USSR was incapable of preventing or defending against were lifted. An official government statement hailed the cessation and expanded peace talks as "an important success along the road to a peace settlement."<sup>13</sup> While crediting the progress in Paris to the DRV and the "Vietnamese," the statement contained none of the anti-American viperations which had highlighted the DRV reaction to the bombing halt.

In what could have hardly been coincidental timing, the Soviets invited the U.S. to confer with the USSR on ways to normalize relations between the two countries. In a speech made in behalf of the Politburo, on 6 November 1968, the First Deputy Premier Mazurov referred to the normalization of relations twice, indicating the importance attached to the subject:

...we have expressed readiness to conduct negotiations with the United States on the entire range of these problems. But their positive solution does not depend on the Soviet Union alone. ...we have always attached great importance to the normalization of relations between the Soviet Union and the United States, which would be important not only to both our countries but also to world peace.<sup>14</sup>

The speech was delivered less than one week after the bombing halt which lends credence to the supposition that it was intended as a conciliatory gesture to encourage the further United States concessions in the pursuit of peace through negotiations instead of on the battlefields of Vietnam.

A further signal of the Soviet desire to solve world problems in general and the Vietnamese conflict in particular by negotiations in contrast to the use of armed force was provided in the Moscow May Day 1969 parade. For the first time the massive display of Soviet military hardware and the review of

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid, 3 November 1968, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid, 7 November 1968, p. 1.



long columns of Soviet troops had been replaced by a civilian march. The reviewing stand was filled, not with the usual bevy of high ranking military officers, but with civilians. Brezhnev, in his May Day speech declared that the Soviets were ready for peaceful coexistence with all countries. He urged that all conflicts be settled at the conference table. Even the annual condemnations of the United States, the Federal German Republic and Israel were not included in the speech.<sup>15</sup>

#### Conclusion

The Soviet Union has, of the four Communist elements involved in Vietnam, taken the least "hawkish" stand. The USSR is caught in an unpleasant quandry. If they take too soft a line they come under fire for not opposing U.S. imperialism. If, on the other hand, the Soviets are too hawkish, the risk of a direct confrontation with the U.S. rises to an unacceptable level. The Soviet leadership has concluded that with the U.S. present in Vietnam there is virtually no chance of the rebel movement achieving the destruction of the RVN. Given that assumption, the wisest Soviet move then becomes a negotiated settlement achieving at least some of the insurgents' objectives. However, the Soviets can not appear to be forcing the DRV/NLF to accept an unsatisfactory peace settlement from the US/RVN and still maintain their pre-eminent leadership position within the Communist World in the face of the strong CPR challenge. Therefore, the Soviets maintain the U.S. must take a "positive view of the well known proposals" of the DRV and the NLF. This stand leaves the door open to the US/RVN that they might not have to accept all the Communist proposals while at the same time

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid, 2 May 1969, p. 1.



demonstrating general support for the DRV/NLF objectives. Offering this general support of objectives and the continued massive supply of war material to the DRV the USSR protects its ideological flanks from Chinese attack.

Equally important, the USSR is not anxious to see an overwhelming NLF victory or an unconditional U.S. withdrawal since such eventualities would vindicate the CPR strategy that the U.S. is indeed a "paper tiger" which can be defeated anywhere by people's war of national liberation. With the cessation of the bombing of the North the sense of urgency in Vietnam, from the Soviet perspective, has vanished. In fact, with shooting disagreements along their frontier with China the Soviets probably do not view the continued U.S. involvement in Vietnam, forcing the deployment of powerful Chinese defensive forces in Southeastern China, as wholly unsatisfactory.



#### IV

#### PEKING AND THE WAR

The Chinese People's Republic has been cast as dangerously radical and revolutionary in their foreign policy and particularly so in relation to the conflict in Vietnam. While not disagreeing that the CPR is, in principle, an ardent proponent of revolution and wars of national liberation, I submit that an examination of the facts will show that the aggressive foreign policy with which they are credited has been largely limited to the verbal battle with the Soviet Union. In reality the CPR has carefully tempered their foreign policy with caution especially when dealing in an area in which the U.S. has a direct interest such as Vietnam.

In spite of claiming a victory in the Korean War the Chinese People's Liberation Army had been roughly handled along the 38th parallel by the American armed forces.<sup>1</sup> There is every reason for the Chinese to believe that future conflicts with the United States would be equally costly and painful experiences. The fear of American involvement in the First Indochina War led to the Chinese urging the DRV to accept a less than satisfactory solution to that conflict.<sup>2</sup>

As the Viet Cong-led insurgency developed in South Vietnam, Chinese support was painless and without risk to the CPR security. As direct American involvement became more and more likely the ante and stakes went up considerably for China since a conflict in such close proximity to Chinese frontiers,

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<sup>1</sup>M. B. Ridgway, The Korean War: How we Met the Challenge (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967) pp. 110-17 and p. 244.

<sup>2</sup>B. B. Fall, "How the French Got Out of Vietnam" in Fall and Raskin, The Vietnam Reader, p. 84.





in which American forces were actively engaged, significantly increased the risk of a direct confrontation between the CPR and the U.S.

Playing on America's own bitter experiences and frustrations in the Korean War with the Chinese People's Liberation Army, the CPR in a series of editorials appearing during the Spring and Summer of 1964 in Jen-min Jeh-pao and one in the North Vietnamese theoretical periodical, Hoc Tap, warned that U.S. intervention in Vietnam would lead to involvement with the CPR.<sup>3</sup> Following the U.S. retaliatory airstrikes in reprisal for the PT boat attacks in August 1964, but before the introduction of American combat formations, China promised to send "Volunteers" and actually delivered some obsolete fighter aircraft to the DRV.<sup>4</sup> As is now well known these CPR warnings did not have the desired effect of preventing U.S. intervention in the war.

The round the clock bombing campaign against North Vietnam and the deployment of U.S. ground troops to South Vietnam initiated in the Spring of 1965 were colossal setbacks for the CPR just as they had been for the Soviet Union. Her southern neighbor and nominal ally was being subjected to a massive aerial assault which was destroying the industrial and transportation facilities of North Vietnam. China was powerless to prevent the devastation.

An unsatisfactory by-product of these developments was the Soviet Union's involvement in an area which China has always viewed as her own bailiwick.<sup>5</sup> Even more alarming was the U.S. decision to bomb the North Vietnamese sanctuary which was a logistic center and base of operations for the war in the

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<sup>3</sup>H. C. Hinton, "China and Vietnam" in China in Crisis edited with comments by Tang Tsou and Ping-ti Ho (Chicago, Ill.: Chicago University Press, 1968) pp. 205-206.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid, p. 206.

<sup>5</sup>D. E. Kennedy, The Security of Southeast Asia (New York, N.Y.: Praeger, 1965), p. 131.



South. This was a sharp break from the unwritten rule of privileged sanctuary in limited conflicts. There had been no bombing or assaults on Germany or Italy during the Spanish Civil War, on Yugoslavia during the Greek insurgency, China during the First Indochina War or North Vietnam in the Laotian struggle during the early 1960's. Now, in a most frightening manner, the United States appeared bent on destroying the North Vietnamese sanctuary. By extension then, if the U.S. was willing to bomb North Vietnam for assisting the war in South Vietnam, would the U.S. not be equally willing to bomb China for assisting North Vietnam? This question touched off an extensive debate in the CPR over priorities in Southeast Asia. The increasingly heavy aerial assault threatened the security of the DRV and the introduction of U.S. ground troops in South Vietnam threatened not only the success but also the existence of the revolution in the South.

The key question, from the Chinese perspective, centered upon the resolution of which was more important: the survival of a secure and viable Communist buffer state on China's southern frontier or the pursuit of revolutionary victory in South Vietnam. The answer was both.

To preserve the DRV, the CPR made a major concession to the Soviet Union signing a trade protocol with the USSR permitting the flow across China by rail of Soviet war supplies to the DRV.<sup>6</sup> With that assistance, of course, went Soviet influence into an area traditionally viewed by China as a Chinese preserve. Apparently, the Chinese leadership felt the sustenance of North Vietnam in the face of U.S. aerial devastation was of sufficient gravity to warrant an increase in Soviet influence within the DRV. Without this agreement, the Soviet's only avenue of supply to the DRV was through Haiphong,

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<sup>6</sup>D. E. Kennedy, The Security of Southeast Asia (New York, N.Y.: Praeger, 1965) p. 131.



whose approaches were controlled by the same U.S. Navy which had confronted and thwarted the Soviets off Cuba just three years before. Chinese strategy evidently assumed massive Soviet assistance would deter the U.S. from seeking the political destruction of the DRV. With the political safety of the DRV reasonably secure the CPR sought to lessen the possibility of a Sin-American clash. The CPR backed off from their previous threat to send "volunteers" to fight with North Vietnam if the United States refused to desist from aggression. Instead, by early 1965, China was only "ready" to send "men" if asked to do so.<sup>7</sup>

The rapid, large scale build-up of American ground elements in South Vietnam during the summer of 1965 caused mounting concern in Peking, Hanoi and the NLF's jungle headquarters. The DRV and NLF, in spite of the tremendous American firepower, did not fundamentally change tactics with the American appearance. The anti-GVN forces chose to remain in Phase III, a conventional war of maneuver, to counter U.S. intervention. To support this massive military effort required conscription of South Vietnamese peasants, the abandonment of some of the more politicized stratagems employed in Phase II, and, most important, substantial, direct North Vietnamese assistance to the Southern guerrillas; first, in the form of arms, then supporting NVA military formations, then NVA combat formations and finally, because of staggering casualties, direct NVA replacements to Viet Cong units.

After several months of relative silence the CPR attacked this strategy as incorrect. In September 1965 Lin Piao, the Chinese Defense Minister, in a major speech, "Long Live the Victory of People's War," admonished the DRV and NLF to revert to the more politicized approach to the war of Phase II or

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<sup>7</sup> Jen-min Jeh-pao, 29 March 1965, editorial.



even Phase I of Giap's blue print for guerrilla warfare. Lin refers to the PLA's defeat of Japan and the KMT by this form of warfare which compensated for the lack of firepower compared to the Japanese and KMT formations. The inference was clearly that with the introduction of U.S. units with their vastly superior firepower, the DRV/NLF should not continue to seek a rapid solution to the war by attempting to defeat the U.S. in conventional battles.

Lin argued that since the introduction of U.S. elements had altered the balance of forces in South Vietnam, the guerrillas should avoid contact with the superior U.S. formations while wearing down the enemy's will to resist in a protracted guerrilla, not conventional, struggle:

Guerrilla warfare is the only way to mobilize and apply the whole strength of the people, the only way to expand our forces in the course of the war, deplete and weaken the enemy, gradually change the balance of forces (and)... switch from guerrilla to mobilize warfare, and finally defeat the enemy.<sup>8</sup>

In Peking's view the DRV/NLF strategy of mobile warfare was not consistent with reality. The guerrilla's must rely on their own small unit tactical superiority to gradually shift the balance of forces. In pursuing this objective they must be self-reliant and without dependence on outside assistance.

Rather than everywhere attempting to oppose the enemy, as the DRV/NLF were, the guerrilla must instead, according to Lin Piao, fight only carefully planned battles of annihilation where the guerrilla units, through rapid concentration, achieve overwhelming local fire superiority:

A battle in which the enemy is routed is not basically decisive in a contest with a force of great strength.

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<sup>8</sup>Zagoria, The Vietnam Triangle, p. 81.







A battle of annihilation produces a great and immediate impact on any enemy. Injuring all of a man's ten fingers is not as effective as chopping one off, and routing ten enemy divisions is not as effective as annihilating one of them.<sup>9</sup>

Equally important the gradual de-escalation might lead to a departure from the war of the American units. This theme received continuing Jen-min Jeh-pao editorial exposure during August, September and October 1966 which indicates the importance attached to the reduction of the level of violence, not for its own sake, but for the security of China by reducing the opportunities for a US-CPR confrontation.

As was to be expected the DRV reaction to Lin's speech was negative. The first indication of disapproval was that the text of this major Chinese policy statement was never published in North Vietnam. Hanoi, instead, published counter arguments, based on the DRV's own revolutionary heritage, that the U.S. would be defeated a la Diem Bien Phu by remaining on the offensive. In direct answer to Lin Piao's call for a strategic retreat Le Duan replied:

It is not fortuitous that in the history of our country, each time we rose to oppose foreign aggression, we took the offensive and not the defensive...Taking the offensive is a strategy, while taking the defensive is only a strategem...We do not disregard foreign countries' weaponry and technology, but we have to know how to apply the...technology, but we have to know how to apply the...techniques which are suitable to our country's situation and characteristics and to our combat methods.<sup>10</sup>

In other words Hanoi was telling Peking and others to supply the welcomed material assistance but they had best leave the strategy to the DRV leadership.

While interested in confining the conflict to South Vietnam, China is not at all interested in any negotiated settlement which does not represent,

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 82.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, pp. 84-85



in fact, a defeat for the United States. Efforts from all quarters to get peace talks started on the Vietnam issue have consistently come under heavy Chinese attack as "frauds" and "tricks" to disguise U.S. aggression. The Jen-min Jeh-pao editorial of 14 October 1966. "Expose the Big Fraud of Inducing Peace Talks Through the Suspension of Bombing," attacks the concept of negotiations which are designed as a trick to fool the Vietnamese people and urges the Vietnamese to continue the fight since the only argument the U.S. understands is the argument of force:

...The two parties (the U.S. and the Soviet Union) were fraternizing like real brothers...The result was a big crop of assorted 'peace talks' plans...Everything points to a new and large scale 'peace offensive' over the Vietnam question by U.S. imperialism and Soviet revisionism. ...Appealing for peace without differentiating right from wrong, echoing the U.S. deception of 'inducing peace talks by a cessation of bombing' and letting the U.S. intrigue of using the U.N. prevail, will only end in rendering service to the U.S. and the Soviet revisionist 'peace talk' conspiracy and in encouraging the United States to widen still further its aggressive war in Vietnam...

Comrade Mao Tse-tung pointed out the impossibility of persuading the imperialists 'to show kindness of heart and turn from their evil ways'. The only course is to organize forces and struggle against them...The Vietnamese people are invincible. U.S. imperialism is doomed to final defeat no matter what 'peace talk' trickery it may resort to or what military adventure it may plot.<sup>11</sup>

The CPR continued to oppose peace talks through President Johnson's announcement of the partial bombing halt of North Vietnam which the CPR labeled as a "smoke screen" for further escalation on the part of the United States:

...peace will return to Vietnam only after the Vietnamese people win victories in the battlefield and drive the U.S. aggressors out.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Peking Review, 14 October 1966, pp. 28-30.

<sup>12</sup>New York Times, 6 April 1968, p. 4.



There occurred at some point between April and November 1968 a fundamental shift in policy or at least emphasis in Peking. In marked contrast to the violent attacks on the alleged connivance to defraud the South Vietnamese people by the U.S. and Soviet revisionists which had followed past peace efforts in Vietnam, the Chinese press published, without comment, the DRV announcement of expanded peace talks in Paris.<sup>13</sup> The lack of Chinese comment--although the DRV statement claimed the expanded talks were a victory for the DRV/NLF which had been forced upon the Americans by defeats suffered in the war--was either an attempt to disassociate China from any peace which might emerge or a decision that a negotiated settlement might serve CPR interests.

Supporting the thesis that China is seeking a negotiated settlement is the fact that since Han Emperor Wu Ti's rule during the second century B.C.<sup>14</sup> China has viewed Indochina as a Chinese satellite area. Should the DRV establish domination over the vast Indochina resource base, China, instead of facing a group of small factionated states, would be next door to a powerful rival. Negotiations might result in a Western oriented South Vietnam but almost certainly will not result in a unified Vietnam. Conversely, continuation on the battlefield might eventually result in a war weary U.S. withdrawal leading to DRV dominance in Indochina. The U.S. might, out of frustration, expand the war in an effort to achieve a military solution. Both of these represent unsatisfactory contingencies for the CPR which points to the belief that the CPR may favor a "settlement" in Vietnam. However,

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid, 6 November 1968, p. 6.

<sup>14</sup>Albert Herrmann, An Historical Atlas of China (Chicago, Ill.: Aldine Publishing Company, 1966) p. 12.



because of the CPR ideological commitment to national wars of liberation it will be unable to publically support negotiations which, in this case, are unlikely to result in an unqualified victory for anyone much less for the NLF.

Also lending credence to the change of CPR orientation on Vietnam was the Chinese request on November 26th, 1968 for a resumption of Ambassadorial level discussions in Warsaw which would lead to a Sino-American peaceful co-existence Pact. These discussions between China and America would be based on two principles:

First, the United States Government...immediately withdrew all its armed forces from China's Taiwan Province and the Taiwan Straights and to dismantle all its military installations in the Taiwan Province.

Second, the United States Government agrees that China and the United States conclude an agreement on the five principles of coexistence.<sup>15</sup>

This request was received with some surprise since the peaceful coexistence theme had been under attack as a revisionistic "fraud" perpetrated by a US-USSR conspiracy. While it is true that at the last minute the Chinese backed out claiming the CIA had spirited off a CPR diplomat in the Netherlands (actually he was in charge of CPR intelligence activities in Western Europe and had defected to the United States) the fact remains that talks were proposed and those talks would have had the object of a Sino-American agreement based on peaceful coexistence instead of continuing conflict. Since the 1 November bombing halt the CPR anti-American propaganda barrage has decreased. The attacks still published have been noticeably less shrill.

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<sup>15</sup> New York Times, 27 November 1968, p. 1.





On 2 March 1969 the CPR imposed a total rail blockade on Soviet war material bound for Vietnam through China.<sup>16</sup> As of mid-July 1969 that blockade was still in effect. It is undoubtedly designed to embarrass the USSR and force a curtailment of Soviet influence in Hanoi. With a rail blockade in effect the only resupply avenue open to the Soviets is the sea. An effort in this sphere would be hampered by the fact that the Suez Canal is closed, that Vladivostok is not an all-weather port and a massive seaborne resupply would operate at the pleasure of the U.S. Fleet.

Equally important to the embarrassment of the Soviets, is the Chinese demonstration to the DRV that Soviet arms shipments are dependent on CPR approval and thus force the DRV more into the Peking camp in the struggle against revisionism. But cutting off the Soviet supplies the CPR may, as well, be attempting to force the DRV to take a more positive view of a negotiated settlement or at least an arrangement which results in a withdrawal of the main impediment to revolutionary victory in the South, massive U.S. troop concentrations. Without massive Soviet assistance the DRV/NLF would be unable to continue to prosecute the war in South Vietnam along the conventional, mobile warfare lines. Thus, by cutting those supplies, the CPR may be able to dictate in conformance with Lin Piao's September 1965 speech a return to phase II, or a more conventional guerrilla warfare line which the CPR has been advocating since 1965. Such a de-escalation would markedly decrease, indeed probably eliminate, the threat of U.S. anti-CPR action.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 15 March 1969, p. 1. citing a "Moscow source."



## Conclusion

The CPR is now interested in a negotiated settlement of the war in Vietnam providing the revolutionaries are not humiliated in the peace package. They may be interested in the continuation of a guerrilla struggle once the U.S. has withdrawn, but for reasons of tactical necessity a negotiated settlement which results in American withdrawal has become the principle objective of the CPR. However, China may not publically avow such a stand or appear to be forsaking their ideological support for national wars of liberation without seriously compromising their position in the ideological battle with the USSR. Specifically, the CPR is no longer promising "volunteers" at the drop of a hat, is no longer threatening the DRV with intervention in case of a "sell out" peace as was the case in 1966,<sup>17</sup> has reduced the anti-American propaganda and has even proposed a US-CPR agreement based on peaceful coexistence.

This subtle shift in CPR policy may be based on the increasingly violent disagreements with the Soviet Union which have recently involved the use of armed force along the Manchurian-Sinkiang frontiers. The CPR has for some time been accusing the Soviets and the U.S. of collusion and may actually fear a Soviet agreement with the U.S. in Europe which would permit the USSR to concentrate more military power in the Far East to confront the CPR. A resolution of the Vietnam conflict then, which does not publically compromise the CPR ideological support for revolution, would be well received in Peking since it would permit counter-concentration by the Chinese with forces presently stationed in South Eastern China.

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<sup>17</sup>H. C. Hinton, "China and Vietnam" in Tsou and Ho, China in Crisis, p. 224.



China demonstrated at Geneva in 1954 that it was fully capable, and indeed inclined, to compromise their support for revolutionary movements if the international balance of forces indicated that such a move was prudent and in the best interests of Communist China. Those conditions now exist for the CPR recovering from the holocaust of the Red Guard movement with a highly vulnerable nuclear capability facing an increasingly impatient United States and a hostile Soviet Union. However, any settlement will have to contain at least some basic concessions to the DRV and particularly the NLF. Lin Piao's speech of 3 September 1965 clearly notified the NLF that they should not expect any outside help in their revolutionary struggle. Wars of national liberation must be won by the indigenous population. Thus as long as the "settlement" does not result in the destruction of the NLF there is every reason to believe that the CPR will lend its support, through acquiescence, to a settlement that will leave the NLF intact and result in the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Vietnam. However, because of the ideological sensitivity of the Vietnam situation the important sections of any agreement must be negotiated in secret and indeed must remain secret to retain this tacit CPR support. Should it appear during the negotiations or come to light subsequent to any agreement that the NLF had been sacrificed or was not going to achieve at least some of their fundamental objectives the CPR would be obliged, in light of its ideological position, to react in a negative and perhaps violent fashion.



## THE QUAGMIRE

The massive infusion of American manpower and firepower to the Vietnam conflict stabilized the deteriorating military situation and by January 1966 there existed a stalemate in South Vietnam. The tremendous U.S. firepower and unprecedented mobility denied the NLF/DRV the ability to achieve local superiority and administer crushing or annihilating defeats to U.S. elements as had been the case with the French in the First Indochina War.<sup>1</sup> Since the new American firepower and mobility was made available to assist the ARVN, the DRV/NLF have been unable to maul the ARVN units with the impunity that they had enjoyed before the entrance of the United States into the war. The tables on the battlefield had been turned. Since mid-1965, it has been the DRV/NLF elements which have been severely battered. The RVN/US have, however, been equally incapable of destroying the insurgents or those who support them.

In this environment the negotiating positions of the various belligerents hardened into static, immovable barriers: the only changes were in the flood of rhetoric. The uncompromising stands were generally led by the United States and North Vietnam with the RVN and NLF remaining, to a large extent, silent partners.

The stalemated military situation persisted throughout the remainder of 1965 and, unbelievably, into early 1968. Escalation on one side was met by

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<sup>1</sup>In addition to the disaster suffered at Diem Bien Phu the French Union Forces suffered overwhelming defeats in numerous other battles throughout Vietnam. For instance, at Plekiu in 1954 a French armored column was ambushed and very roughly handled by the Vietminh during the next several days as they struggled to fight their way out of the ambush. In the course of the battle the French suffered over 4,000 casualties. Fall, Street Without Joy, p. 182-246.





counter-escalation on the other until by February 1968 the conflict had progressed only to the extent that it had become a gigantic, stationary bloodbath. American bombers, naval gunfire and artillery were devastating large areas of North Vietnam including the recently constructed and highly prized industrial projects.<sup>2</sup>

The South Vietnamese countryside was systematically being reduced to rubble under the constant U.S., RVN, DRV and NLF bombardment. The southern population was alternately bombed or shelled by the various combatants. The peasants were herded by the RVN, sometimes against their will, into fortified hamlets where they were shelled by the DRV/NLF. If left in their own villages they were assassinated or used as shields by the DRV/NLF.

By 1968, while neither side was making any apparent military progress neither were they budging from their demands laid down, so long before, in 1965. There could be no movement toward a peace settlement until either the United States, the DRV or both modified, in a basic manner, their long maintained positions which were, as they then stood, intrinsically at odds with each other.

As late as 1 February 1968 the difficulty of coming to grips with the essentials of negotiating the settlement of a war no one was winning was illustrated in Secretary of Defense McNamara's Annual Report to Congress when he summarized the Administration's Vietnam goals:

We do not seek North Vietnam's capitulation or even the surrender of her regular Army units engaged in the conflict..., we would be content to have them return home. Neither do we seek the surrender of the Viet Cong

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<sup>2</sup>Harrison Salisbury, Behind Enemy Lines (New York, N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1967), various.



forces; we would be content to see them lay down their arms... or move to the North...<sup>3</sup>

To call for NVA elements to return to North Vietnam or for the NLF to "lay down" their arms, when they had not been subjected to any shattering military defeats but had not yet achieved any of the objectives they started fighting for in the first place, is a fantastic demand. Equally unrealistic has been the DRV demand that the U.S. unilaterally and unconditionally de-escalate the war by permanently ceasing the bombing of North Vietnam and withdrawing from South Vietnam without some corresponding DRV concessions.

The belligerents had not yet accepted the reality that they had, under the ground rules of the war's conduct, been unable to bring sufficient military and political pressure to bear against their opponents to force the opponent to prefer negotiations and possible compromise of some elemental issues at the conference table to certain compromise of all or most fundamental objectives if the conflict continued to a resolution on the battlefield. Since that pressure has not been achieved by either side, each must recognize that for negotiations to have even the slightest prospect of success they must be prepared to modify some of the very basic objectives for which they are fighting.

There occurred in the late Winter and early Spring of 1968 several monumental events which set in motion the slow and painful journey toward peace in Vietnam. The first of these events was the DRV/NLF Tet Offensive which opened on the night of 31 January 1968. With a large number of ARVN personnel home with their families for the Tet holiday, the Communists opened

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<sup>3</sup>Kessing Contemporary Archives, 23-30 March 1968.



a massive, well planned and executed, country-wide offensive against the major population centers throughout Vietnam.

Many of the U.S. and best ARVN units were deployed on interdiction missions designed to prevent the Communists from using the truce period to re-supply or reposition their units. As a result they were unable to immediately enter the battle. In spite of later U.S. and RVN proclamations, the Communists achieved at least tactical, if not strategic surprise throughout the country. When coupled with the leave status of the ARVN and the location of many of the U.S. and ARVN units which were on alert, the DRV/NLF forces achieved spectacular initial success in the offensive. Within the first few days of the DRV/NLF drive, sizeable segments of Saigon, Hue, the Mekong Delta cities of My Tho, Ben Tre and Vinh Long and numerous other Provincial and District capitols were in Communist hands.<sup>4</sup>

That they were eventually driven out with heavy losses<sup>5</sup> is relatively less significant than the monumental political setback which was incurred by the US/RVN. The staunchest supporters of the GVN had been the city dwellers. The Tet offensive caused widespread urban loss of faith in the GVN ability to protect the cities.

The U.S. and ARVN initial reaction was one of dismay. After years of hard fighting the enemy demonstrated it could still launch a devastating offensive. The onslaught came at a time when the rural pacification program

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<sup>4</sup>New York Times, 1-6 February 1968, various reports from the battle fronts in South Vietnam.

<sup>5</sup>There was of course heavy damage to the cities as a result of the fierce fighting and the US/RVN air and artillery bombardment to dislodge the attackers. The loss of civilian life was staggering as the urban population was caught in the vicious cross fire between attackers and defenders.



was supposedly showing some signs of progress<sup>6</sup> yet the post-mortem of the offensive had revealed that large quantities of weapons had been stockpiled, with the assistance of civilians, within the cities themselves.

On 12 March 1968 Senator Eugene McCarthy nominally representing anti-war dissidents in America received a stunning 42% of the vote as a write-in candidate against President Johnson, who received 44%, in the New Hampshire Presidential Primary. Much more dramatically than any opinion poll the primary demonstrated to the President that a large segment of the American population judged his Vietnam policy as unsatisfactory.

Before the Tet Offensive, the Administration had attempted to force concessions from Hanoi by upping the military ante and increasing the military pressure both in North and South Vietnam. First a limited bombing campaign and then a limited commitment of U.S. troops were tried. When unsuccessful in forcing DRV/NLF concessions the bombing campaign and the commitment of troops was expanded incrementally until the U.S. had, by February 1968, committed over 520,000 troops and was engaged in a virtually unlimited aerial assault on North Vietnam. (The only major targets not approved for destruction were the wharves at Haiphong, the dike system which keeps the Red River within its banks in the Delta area and the population of North Vietnam as a specific target instead of incidental victims in the bombing of military targets.) Complementing the in-country forces was a huge naval commitment in the form of four aircraft carriers, dozens of destroyers, several cruisers, a battleship and a host of support vessels. Based in Thailand for use against North Vietnam was a large air fleet. (The use of

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<sup>6</sup>New York Times, 2 April 1968, p. 1.





Thailand for raids against the DRV is certainly an act of war by Thailand against North Vietnam establishing a *causa belli*.)

The strategy of incrementally increasing the military pressure to force elemental changes in the DRV or NLF positions had, in a political sense, been a failure. In spite of this massive effort the DRV/NLF attained the capability to launch a paralyzing attack. In light of the Communist Tet Offensive and the showing of Senator McCarthy, President Johnson set in motion a fundamental policy review which was triggered by General Westmoreland's request for 200,000 additional U.S. troops to cope with the increased enemy activity.<sup>7</sup> This policy review resulted in a basic shift in American strategy. For the first time the United States would try to lure the DRV, and through them the NLF, to the conference table with military concessions instead of escalations.

On the 31st of March 1968 President Johnson announced, in a nation-wide broadcast, that the U.S. was unilaterally suspending the air attacks and naval bombardment of North Vietnam except the North Vietnamese Panhandle. The President then called on Ho Chi Minh to respond in a favorable manner to this American initiative:

Now, as in the past, the United States is ready to send its representative to any forum, at any time to discuss the means to bring this ugly business to an end...I call upon Ho Chi Minh to respond positively and favorably to this new step towards peace.<sup>8</sup>

The President attempted to convey to the DRV that while the United States was prepared to bear any hardship for the survival of liberty, which presumably, referred to a free South Vietnam, America and the President in particular wanted peace:

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid, 1 April 1968, p. 26.



Of those to whom much is given; much is asked. I can not say--no man could say--that no more will be asked of us. Yet I believe...this generation of Americans is willing to pay the price, bear any burden, bear any hardship, help any friend, oppose any foe to assure the the survival and the success of liberty...What we won when all our people united must not now be lost in suspicion and distrust and selfishness and politics among any of our people...Accordingly, I shall not seek and will not accept the nomination of my party for the Presidency.<sup>9</sup>

The sincerity of the U.S. offer for peace could hardly have been established in a more forceful manner. For President Johnson to bow out of the Presidency, an office he had sought all his political life, was comparable to a monarch abdicating for peace. At the same time, he tried to make it clear that while anxious for peace the United States was not going to renege on any promises or violate any trusts.

The DRV replied almost immediately to the President's initiative declaring on 3 April 1968:

The Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam declares its readiness to appoint its representative to contact the United States with a view to determining the American side to the unconditional cessation of the United States bombing raids and other acts of war...<sup>10</sup>

Two days later the NLF endorsed the DRV decision to meet with the U.S. in essentially bilateral negotiations to work out the conditions for full scale discussions between the four belligerents.<sup>11</sup>

The difficulty agreeing on a mutually satisfactory site for the negotiations was not an unimportant matter. Both the DRV and the U.S. were trying to demonstrate to the other that, although they had agreed to discuss the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 4 April 1968, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 6 April 1968, p. 3.



Vietnam War at the same table, there was hard bargaining with no gratis concessions ahead. With the partial bombing campaign still being conducted against North Vietnam the United States would attempt to extract concessions from the DRV in return for the complete bombing halt that the DRV insisted upon. When the discussions finally got started with the DRV in Paris they almost immediately became deadlocked on the issue of the continuation of the partial bombing campaign: North Vietnam insisting on an immediate, unconditional cessation while the U.S. demanded some equivalent DRV concessions in return.

After months of fruitless talks with the DRV, the United States again moved to break the impasse. In October 1968 the U.S. proposed to the DRV a complete U.S. bombing halt based upon immediate expansion of the peace talks to include the RVN, a discussion of political issues and an understanding with the DRV/NLF that they would refrain from attacks on major southern population centers:

The President simply could not maintain a cessation of the bombing of North Vietnam unless it was very promptly evident to him, to the American people and to our Allies that it was indeed a step towards peace. If there were abuses of the de-militarized zone, Viet Cong or North Vietnamese attacks on cities or other populated areas such as provincial capitols in South Vietnam or a refusal by Hanoi authorities to enter promptly into serious political discussions that included the elected government of South Vietnam, a bombing halt simply could not be sustained.<sup>12</sup>

Following some counter proposals by the DRV concerning the prompt entry into meaningful negotiations with the RVN the formula to on 21 October

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid, 1 November 1968, p. 11, quoting an "authoritative source" which was never denied by the U.S. but was almost immediately challenged by the DRV which claimed the bombing halt was "unconditional."



1968.<sup>13</sup> The United States suspended all air and naval attacks against North Vietnam effective on 1 November.

There again followed an agonizing delay while the DRV, RVN, and U.S. haggled about the shape of the negotiating table; whether the NLF and RVN would be seated as separate delegations and the order of presentation of argument. However, compared to the fact that, at least in principle, the belligerents had agreed to a negotiated settlement, these would appear on the surface to be unimportant. In fact, they were extremely important. The Communist negotiating technique is one of absolute rigidity on minor matters attempting to force small concessions which establish a conciliatory attitude which leads, to larger and more important concessions. Thus it was necessary for all participants to demonstrate that they would not be bullied and were immune to delay, badgering and bluster. Therefore each side resisted compromise on these procedural matters with the utmost of tenacity and the four way negotiations did not begin until mid-January 1969.<sup>14</sup>

Before moving on to consider the prospects for peace in Vietnam it is proper at this juncture to quickly review the political parameters imposed by the belligerent's perspective of the events outlined in Chapter One, as well as more recent events. These parameters will, barring the unlikely military defeat of one side or the other, establish the basic framework of any possible agreement which might reasonably be expected to emerge from the Paris negotiations.

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid, 18 January 1969, p. 1.





## The Democratic Republic of Vietnam

a. In 1954 under pressure from the Soviet Union and the CPR the DRV agreed to a peace settlement that was less than satisfactory even though their military forces were in a position to continue the fight to force a more favorable solution. In return for their agreement the DRV received an armistice which gave them control of less territory than they held before the Agreement and a Document of dubious legal validity promising unification elections. That the 1954 Agreement, which they were pressured to sign by their ostensible allies, did not result in the assimilation of South Vietnam or prevent the United States from propping up the Southern regime with money and, in the end, armed force cannot fail to make the DRV more independent of DPR and Soviet pressures today, after 15 years as the legal government of North Vietnam than they were in 1954 when operating from a "capitol" hidden under some remote jungle canopy.

b. The DRV is, as we have seen, determined to unify Vietnam under DRV control. To accomplish this the DRV has provided the southern insurgents with arms, munitions, leadership and direct armed assistance. To direct the insurgency the NFLSN was formed and led by the People's Revolutionary Party which is simply the southern branch of the Lao Dong Party. Since, perhaps as early as 1961 but certainly since 1964, NVA units have been used in South Vietnam in a conventional war of maneuver designed to annihilate the GVN. The depth of this conviction is demonstrated by the DRV refusal to budge from this determination to destroy the GVN in spite of massive casualties to NVA elements in South Vietnam and the awesome air offensive unleashed against North Vietnam by the U.S. Their fledgling industry was reduced to rubble; bridges, railroad and motor transport, barge and ship traffic were by-in-large destroyed and large segments of the residential districts adjacent to



military targets were razed. Even discounting the human sacrifice, in monetary terms alone the reconstruction of North Vietnam will be a gigantic fiscal undertaking. Yet the DRV refused to quit the struggle which was causing the tremendous devastation of their country and suffering of their citizenry.

When one considers the stupendous sacrifices in material and human suffering already born by the North Vietnamese it is inconceivable that they will agree to any settlement not fulfilling at least part of their objective of unifying Vietnam such as, perhaps, the establishment of a neutral government in South Vietnam committed and bound by an enforceable international agreement to the reunification of Vietnam on some long term but specified time table.

c. To maintain even a semblance of control and influence with the NLF after any settlement, not resulting in the unlikely event of unification, the DRV must insure that the NLF receives ironclad, enforceable and absolute guarantees against reprisals such as occurred, contrary to the 1954 Agreement guarantees, under Diem's arbitrary and dictatorial rule in the mid and late 1950's. The NLF fear of reprisals after a long and bitter war marked by ruthless killing by both the NLF and the RVN, may be of sufficient magnitude to cause the NLF to continue the war alone if the DRV should agree to any settlement not providing adequate protection against large scale, deliberate reprisals.<sup>15</sup>

d. The DRV sees in the United States policies relating to Vietnam a sinister intransigence and basic hostility towards the DRV. Reinforcing

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<sup>15</sup> J. J. Zasloff, Origins of Insurgency in South Vietnam: Role of the Southern Viet Minh (Santa Monica, Calif: Rand Corporation, 1965). This theme is developed at length in this short Rand Memorandum.



this view were the U.S. refusal to assent to the Final Declaration, encouragement to the State of Vietnam to refuse to participate in the proposed 1956 unification elections, the U.S. leadership in the organization of the SEATO pact and the Protocol affecting South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia and finally U.S. military support of the RVN against the DRV/NLF. Particularly alarming must have been the 1955 SEATO Protocol which guaranteed the "independence" of South Vietnam even before the July 1956 deadline for the reunification elections and in spite of the 1954 Conference admonition that the demarcation was in no way to be considered a boundary. This view of the United States, as a less than trustworthy nation, can be expected to contribute to a DRV unwillingness to reach a negotiated settlement requiring the good will and acquiescence of the U.S.

#### The National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam

a. Similar to the Soviet and Chinese pressure on the DRV in 1954, the DRV forced the southern Vietminh to agree to a solution to the First Indochina War which resulted in the surrender of territories held by the southern insurgents. In other words, the DRV signed away victories bought with southern blood. Additionally, during the previous war the northern DRV leadership appeared to take steps which were designed to prevent a successful revolution in the South which might have posed the problem of a leadership rivalry. Overly successful southern Vietminh commanders were, on occasion, betrayed to the French Union Forces who then, conveniently, conducted the executions.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Critchfield, The Long Charade, p. 46 and Fall, The Two Vietnams, various.



In Vietnam there has traditionally been southern mistrust of northerners and northern contempt of southerners. The DRV indifference to southern objectives and, indeed, the apparent DRV view that the South is a tool to be used for the benefit of the North, stimulated the deep-rooted and fundamental distrust by southerners of the DRV leadership. This basic difference leads to the assumption that the NLF may not be as anxious for unification as the DRV. This assumption is supported by the public utterances of the NLF leadership which has, especially during the recent years, advocated the independence of South Vietnam for a period of up to twenty years. For instance, in an interview for L'Monde on 15 January 1967, the NLF representative to the Soviet Union, Dang Quang Minh, said: "...the South Vietnamese...want national independence, democracy, peace and neutrality...unification will be done by stages, on the basis of the agreement of the people of the two zones, without the adsorption of one by the other..."<sup>17</sup>

This basic distrust of northerners, reinforced by recent historical events will make the NLF most cautious of any DRV proposals during the negotiations which are clearly not in the best interests of the NLF. Any proposals which might be attractive only to the North, at the expense of the South, can be expected to be rejected out-of-hand by the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam.

b. As previously noted the NLF, because of past experiences under Diem and the length and bitterness of the present war, will demand some very concrete guarantees against reprisals in any settlement which might not leave the NLF in de facto control of South Vietnam. The southern Vietminh

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<sup>17</sup>L'Monde (Paris), 16 January 1967.





returned to their homes in 1954 with Geneva "guarantees" of freedom from reprisals and the prospects of peaceful union with the North. That neither of these guarantees were convertible in actuality can not help but to influence the NLF position during the Paris negotiations. The southern Vietminh view is probably that they won the First Indochina War and lost the peace. They should be expected to attempt to prevent a recurrence of that event.

c. While the NLF is nowhere strong enough to deny US/RVN access to any area, substantial sections of South Vietnam are, in fact, governed by the NLF. Even if the most recent US/RVN estimates of "secure" and "relatively secure" villages are correct, which is improbable, at least twenty-five percent of the rural population is not at all secure.<sup>18</sup> U.S. estimates rank seventy-five percent of the villages as secure or relatively secure while the RVN figure is eighty-six percent. Controlling twenty-five percent of the rural population and exercising at least partial control in "relatively secure" areas translates, politically, to a powerful lever for forcing concessions since the NLF must be expected to continue to fight rather than surrender control of their territory if at least some of their fundamental goals are not realized.

d. Past Communist experience with coalition governments which do not leave the Communists in de facto control of the government will inhibit a solution which envisions a true coalition government. The coalition governments which did not leave the control in Communist hands, such as formed in China during the late 1920's, resulted in disasters or near disasters for the

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<sup>18</sup> New York Times, 1 February 1969, p. 12.



indigenous Communists. In Vietnam, where the usual communist-anti-communist bitterness has been deepened by years of vicious fighting and assassination and there are in existence rival armies, the chances of the NLF entering a true coalition are, therefore, remote.

#### The Republic of Vietnam

a. The ruling elite in South Vietnam is determined to maintain the independence of South Vietnam under the present leadership. Since the NLF is controlled by the People's Revolutionary Party which is, purportedly, simply the southern wing of the Lao Dong Party it is difficult for the RVN to view the NLF as anything except a vassal of the DRV and as such, a threat to the independence of South Vietnam. In exchange for NLF participation in southern political life the RVN will continue to insist on the severance of NLF-DRV ties.

b. Given the RVN view that the war in South Vietnam is the result of Northern inspiration, leadership and armed assistance, it is understandable that Saigon tends to view concessions as rewards for aggression. In what is essentially a political struggle, regardless of how many hundreds of thousands of troops might be involved, concessions represent victories for one side and defeat for the other. As such they may effect morale in approximately the same manner as battlefield victories and defeats. Until recently the political base of the GVN and the morale of the ARVN was so shakey it is debatable whether the RVN could have survived any significant concessions to the DRV/NLF. Even with the increased political stability and confidence in South Vietnam, concessions to the DRV/NLF are not well received. The GVN leadership has repeatedly declared that since US/RVN



concessions do not produce favorable reciprocal action by the enemy, concessions should be halted pending a change in NLF/DRV attitude.

c. Although almost defeated during the military and political crisis of the mid-1960's, the RVN, with U.S. assistance, has survived and apparently grows stronger with the passage of time. It is therefore unlikely that the GVN will be willing to concede in Paris what it has not lost in Vietnam. This attitude was articulated by Vice President Ky following the announcement that expanded peace talks would be held in Paris:

We are not the losers on the battlefields so there is no reason for us to be at a disadvantage at the conference.<sup>19</sup>

#### The United States

a. The United States is publically committed to the defense of South Vietnam. The appearance of honestly fulfilling that commitment is viewed by the U.S. as vital to the security of America. In 1969 it is pointless, in terms of seeking a solution, to argue the legality or soundness of the original commitment. The simple presence of over a half million U.S. troops irrevocably links U.S. prestige to the war in Vietnam and its solution. The question now, as President Nixon framed it, is:

We can have honest debate about whether we should have entered the war. We can have honest debate about the past conduct of the war. But the urgent question today is what to do now that we are there, not whether we should have entered on this course, but what is required of us today.<sup>20</sup>

The U.S. has built, since World War II, a global network of bilateral and multilateral mutual assistance treaties designed primarily to contain

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<sup>20</sup>New York Times, 15 May 1969, p. 16.



the Soviet Union and, more recently, the CPR. The deterrent effect of those treaties is based on the assumption, by friend and foe alike, that if called upon to do so, the U.S. would provide treaty assistance. If in Vietnam the U.S. gives even the appearance of reneging or not whole-heartedly fulfilling a public commitment, the consequences to world-wide stability could be disastrous. In Asia the tendency towards instability would be even more pronounced. Virtually every non-Communist nation in Asia is dependent on American protection to prevent encroachment on their sovereignty. The abandonment<sup>21</sup> in a time of stress and challenge, without having suffered a military defeat, only a loss of will, of solemn pledges made by the Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon Administrations, a treaty protocol and a Congressional Resolution would have most far reaching and unpredictable repercussions. At a minimum all free Asian governments would have to re-examine their relationships with the CPR and the U.S. in light of an American abandonment of another free Asian government to subversion when the burden of honoring a pledge became too heavy and unpopular.

Further, a U.S. withdrawal would vindicate the DRV and CPR advocacy of wars of national liberation as the correct method of challenging the imperialistic system maintained by the U.S. As such, all other non-Communist Asian governments would either have to reach an understanding with the CPR or face the threat of their own externally supported insurgencies, perhaps unassisted by the U.S.

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<sup>21</sup>Abandonment might, in Asian eyes, include withdrawal of U.S. forces without similar moves on the part of the DRV or forcing a Communist dominated coalition of the RVN.





Of cardinal importance is the affect the appearance of a U.S. abandonment of South Vietnam to their Communist adversaries would have in Japan. American hopes for Asian stability ride with Japan and the naive view that U.S. and Japanese Asian interests will always be identical. At present there are certain similarities which tend to make American and Japanese Asian goals complementary. While there is a good deal of Japanese left wing sniping at American Vietnamese Policy, the effect in Japan of a precipitous U.S. withdrawal would be shattering. Presently protecting Japan from CPR nuclear adventurism is the U.S. deterrent force committed, by the 1960 Japanese-American Security Treaty, to defend Japan. Should the U.S. demonstrate in Vietnam it is unwilling to defend, at the price of several tens of thousands of U.S. killed in action a country which has requested U.S. protection and to which the U.S. had solemnly pledged that protection, what grounds would Japan have to expect the U.S. to risk even the limited Chinese nuclear strike<sup>22</sup> to protect Japan? The consequences of a Japanese loss of faith in U.S. protection is an unknown quantity of staggering proportions. Already a fiscal and industrial super power, Japan could, almost overnight, become the world's third military super power if the Japanese leadership decided that such action was necessary to protect the Home Islands. With the technological, industrial and economic base in Japan it is unlikely that Japan armed with nuclear weapons would be another U.K. or

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<sup>22</sup>If even one Chinese missile reached an American urban target it would kill more Americans in a micro-second than have died in eight years of fighting in Vietnam. Actually since the Chinese are testing thermonuclear warheads a single such warhead reaching target might well kill more Americans than have died in all of America's wars since the beginning of our history if the warhead impacted on a major metropolis such as New York or Los Angeles.



CPR with a very limited strike capability. The world-wide implications of a three way struggle are unfathomable but are, almost certainly, more dangerous than the present East-West division.

While Japan is certainly capable of self-defense against any Asian force, what would become of the less powerful nations if U.S. determination to guarantee those governments were to be suspect? They would, at least, have to reappraise their relationships with the U.S., USSR and, especially, CPR in light of an American retreat from the burdens of Free Asian leadership.

Although the precedent of simply walking away from a problem as if it did not exist was set by Britain in Greece following World War II and by the U.S. in China during the late 1940's, the de-stabilizing influence of such an action in Vietnam could upset the delicate world balance founded to a large extent on the credibility of the American willingness to use armed strength in response to treaty obligations to check the forceful expansion of Communism into the so-called Free World. The balance is therefore tied directly to such abstract terms as Duty, Honor and Trust. The absolute necessity of maintaining the credibility of such concepts as they relate to America and the world's belief that they are meaningful to the United States was noted by President Nixon:

When we assumed the burden of helping defend South Vietnam, millions of men, women and children placed their trust in us. To abandon them now would risk a massacre that would shock and dismay everyone...who values human life.

Abandoning the South Vietnamese...would jeopardize more than lives in South Vietnam. It would threaten our longer-term hopes for peace in the world. A great trust cannot renege on its pledges. A great nation must be worthy of trust.

When it comes to maintaining peace, prestige is not an empty word... I speak rather of the respect that



one nation has for another's integrity in defending its principles and meeting its obligations.

If we simply abandoned our effort in Vietnam, the cause of peace might not survive the damage that would be done to other nation's confidence in our reliability.<sup>23</sup>

Thus from the American point of view there can be no withdrawal from Vietnam under pressure, with the nation's tail between its legs either in actuality or in appearance. It is essential to U.S. security elsewhere that the solution, above anything else, have the outward appearance of honor and legitimacy.

b. The war in Vietnam is advertised by the DRV and the CPR as a test case for the strategy of undermining Free World governments through people's wars of national liberation. General Giap identified the significance of the present conflict in Vietnam as that test case:

If the special warfare that the United States are testing in South Vietnam is overcome, then it can be defeated anywhere in the world.<sup>24</sup>

With world-wide commitments providing treaty protection to Free World sovereign nations--in many instances the treaties are operative in the case of internal subversion--a U.S. objective then became to demonstrate that such wars of national liberation were doomed to costly and painful failure.<sup>25</sup>

c. The principle of self-determination is intrinsic to the present American position. The reasoning in Washington and Saigon has, to date, been that while the NLF operates as an armed political element, controlling

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<sup>23</sup>New York Times, 15 May 1969, p. 16.

<sup>24</sup>Quoted by General Maxwell Taylor during the General's prepared statement before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in February, 1966; The Vietnam Hearings, edited with introduction and notes by Senator J. W. Fulbright, p. 169.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.



substantial segments of the population, there could be no freedom of choice or freedom from terrorist influence in those areas controlled by the insurgents. Therefore, an essential element of the US/RVN position is that before being accepted into the political life in South Vietnam the NLF must renounce violence and disarm:

We believe there should be an opportunity for full participation in the political life of South Vietnam by all political elements that are prepared to do so without the use of force or intimidation.<sup>26</sup>

d. The tremendous American troop strength in South Vietnam is a very important negotiating lever. The NLF, CPR and DRV are all most anxious to see the United States military presence reduced and withdrawn as soon as possible. The DRV and the NLF because it thwarts their war objectives and the CPR because it represents a direct threat to CPR security. The U.S. is determined to convert this anxiety into some fundamental concessions and mutual DRV action in return for any substantial U.S. withdrawals.

e. The failure of previous negotiated settlements in Indochina is bound to exercise a profound effect in Washington. The inability of the ICC to force DRV compliance with the 1954 and 1962 Geneva Agreements casts considerable doubt on the ability of an international body to enforce a complicated agreements between reluctant signatories violently opposed to each other. Thus while calling for international supervision of any settlement the Administration can not be unaware of the past DRV, or for that matter U.S., disregard of basic elements of the previous agreements. The DRV unwillingness even to permit International Red Cross inspection of POW camps

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<sup>26</sup>New York Times, 15 May 1969, p. 16.





in North Vietnam is indicative of the DRV attitude towards supra-national inspection bodies and infringement on DRV sovereignty. This DRV attitude threatens the possibility of a settlement supervised by an international body.

f. The continued DRV military activities in Laos, Cambodia and Thailand tends to confirm the American suspicions that the DRV is, in fact, attempting to establish North Vietnamese control over the entire Indochina Peninsula. Particularly inflammatory has been the NVA and DRV supported Pathet Lao offensives, undertaken during July 1969, at a time when the NVA was purportedly relaxing the pressure in South Vietnam.

Even the most cursory examination of the essential policy determinants or objectives of the four belligerents reveals elemental differences on key issues such as troop withdrawal, attitudes towards inspection and the importance of such concepts as coalition government and self-determination.

The definition of terms used in the dialogue between the combatants is an area fraught with the danger of misunderstanding. For instance, a coalition government to most Americans connotes representation of the majority of South Vietnamese political groupings, including the NLF, within an armistice government. However, when the NLF and DRV refer to a coalition government the exclusion of the present RVN leadership is assumed and any possibility of RVN participation is denied.<sup>27</sup> For their part the RVN, while proclaiming their welcome to any party which excludes violence as a legitimate political tool, forbids, at the penalty of jail sentences, even the use of the word coalition to describe any possible post-war government.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>R. A. Faulk, A Vietnam Settlement: The View from Hanoi (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Center of International Studies, 1968) p. 11.

<sup>28</sup>New York Times, 9 June 1969, p. 1.



The use of a relatively simple term such as foreign troops founders on the shoals of multi-definitionalism. In the lexicon of Hanoi there are two types of Vietnamese armed forces in South Vietnam: puppet, meaning ARVN, and Vietnamese, meaning Viet Cong and NVA. There can be no foreign Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam since there is but one Vietnam. The tenacity with which this is maintained is illustrated by the fact that the DRV refuses to acknowledge the presence of NVA elements in South Vietnam in spite of the fact that thousands are held in RVN POW camps. Given this DRV/NLF public view, the U.S. and RVN proposals for foreign, including NVA, troop withdrawals are met with scorn and rejection. With the central war goals of the various belligerents firmly in mind some parameters defining any possible solution may be drawn. Perhaps the first and easiest to draw are negative or at least definitions of what constitutes unlikely or impossible developments.

The large scale presence of American combat elements precludes a DRV/NLF military victory in South Vietnam. The unprecedented air mobility of American units has denied the guerrillas of any secure base camp areas from which to launch decisive offensives. Those offensives which have been attempted have, in the military sense, been thwarted by the virtually unlimited firepower immediately available to even the smallest U.S. infantry patrol in contact with the Communists. As long as the United States remains directly and centrally involved in the War the DRV and NLF simply lack the military wherewithal to defeat the U.S. supported RVN.

If the NLF and DRV are incapable of defeating the forces supporting the RVN, the U.S. and RVN appear, under the present ground rules, unable to



defeat the anti-GVN forces. The domestic pressures in America to end or at least deescalate the war are led by powerful men such as Senators Fulbright, McGovern, Ted Kennedy, McCarthy and the late Bobby Kennedy. There has been substantial grass root support for U.S. disengagement or, at least, uneasiness over the current policies. Even if those opposing the war in Vietnam do not compromise a majority of the American electorate, they constitute a large and vocal segment of the society probably capable of blocking any Administration attempts to increase U.S. troop strength in South Vietnam or to reescalate the war against North Vietnam in an attempt to stimulate movement at the peace conference.

Another factor militating against any U.S. attempt to resolve the war through military channels is the North Vietnamese Army. The U.S. Air Force's post-World War II Strategic Bombing Survey and America's more recent experiences in strategic aerial assault indicate that it is virtually impossible to bomb, without the use of nuclear weapons, a country into submission and oblivion. Barring the use of nuclear persuaders the traditional method of coercion used to force an unwilling and defiant nation to accept on bended knee the desires of another is invasion and conquest. Yet a U.S. invasion of North Vietnam is almost certainly foredoomed to failure and perhaps disaster.

The very substantial portion of the People's Army of Vietnam uncommitted to the war in South Vietnam and the guerrilla heritage of the DRV would make an invasion a most hazardous task. In a conventional war of maneuver the force on the offensive normally requires a 3:1 manpower advantage to offset the defense's advantage of fighting from prepared positions against troops and vehicles assaulting in the open and the defense's capability, unless



routed, of counter-attacking with reserves the exhausted assault troops. In a counter-guerrilla situation the ratio has traditionally been figured at 10:1 to permit simultaneous garrison guard of vital urban, logistic and communication centers and offensive sweeps to destroy main force units. Since the PAVN has at least 14 divisions with which to defend North Vietnam<sup>29</sup> almost any invasion force would require a minimum of 21 and a maximum of 70 divisions.<sup>30</sup> In other words, a minimum U.S. invasion force would be composed of at least 315,000 combat troops plus hundreds of thousands of support elements. Clearly this scale of effort is not only politically out of the question but impossible without the mobilization of all Ready Reserve Forces and months of preparation. Compounding an already difficult proposition would be the patriotic spirits which would be raised in defense of the fatherland invaded by a white, Occidental nation. The results of any U.S. invasion of North Vietnam would tend towards the expansion of a stalemated guerrilla war to include all of Vietnam rather than any decisive campaign to end the war in South Vietnam.

The reaction of the CPR to any American action which clearly threatened the political security of the DRV, such as an invasion, should, if Korea is any example, be expected to be most violent. It is inconceivable that from both an ideological and strategic point of view Peking could, without fighting, acquiesce to a U.S. conquest of North Vietnam.

Therefore, except under the most extraordinary circumstances and extreme provocation of the United States, a military solution may be excluded

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<sup>29</sup> Fall and Raskin, The Vietnam Reader, p. 339.

<sup>30</sup> This figure is arrived at by computing the strength of a PAVN division using a muster strength of 8-10,000 men and a U.S. divisional strength of 15,000.





because: One, the DRV and NLF are incapable of defeating the RVN as long as the U.S. continues to support that government and two, the U.S. is unwilling, for a variety of political and strategic considerations, to change the war's ground rules to permit the application of the overwhelming military pressure to destroy North Vietnam and crush the NLF.

The heavy investment of political capital by the United States and North Vietnam in their South Vietnamese proxies severely restricts their public maneuvering room. The U.S. has ruled out a precipitous withdrawal of American combat elements on the grounds that the resulting DRV supported victory would be a de-stabilizing influence on the U.S. maintained world-wide security system. American withdrawals must therefore be matched by PAVN withdrawals yet for the DRV to publically agree to corresponding PAVN withdrawals implies DRV acquiescence to U.S. pressure, the legitimacy of the RVN as a nation and its right to request U.S. assistance and DRV abandonment of the NLF to their fate in a move alarmingly similar to the 1954 Geneva Agreements. Each of these represent, for the DRV, politically unacceptable admissions which would probably result in the loss of all or most influence which the DRV might retain within the NLF.

The inability, for political, ideological and strategic reasons, of the United States and the DRV to publically acknowledge the legitimacy of the fundamental aims of the other tend to make agreement impossible. For instance, the U.S. demands for corresponding PAVN withdrawals which is, as we have seen, not possible for the DRV to publically agree to. Similarly, the United States feels incapable of complying with the DRV demand for U.S. withdrawals without comparable PAVN moves. Yet the Nixon Administration is under heavy pressure to find some solution to the war or, at least, to reduce the killing.



The experiences of the 1954 and 1962 Geneva Agreements will tend to make all parties most cautious of any settlement guaranteed by an international body or group of signatory nations. The blatant disregard by all concerned parties and the complete inability of the supervisory commissions to force compliance with the two previous international agreements on South-east Asia illustrated the vast gulf between agreement and equality. Rather than trusting enforcement of any forthcoming agreements to an international body the belligerents will probably prefer to have some more direct and trustworthy mechanism to protect their vital interests such as their own armies.

The mutually exclusive nature of what each belligerent considers essential to its position almost precludes a public settlement to the war. More likely is a series of secret agreements or understandings between the belligerents in which each achieves some of its fundamental objectives. The conclusion of secret understandings would permit each to maintain its public stance on controversial issues for the benefit of domestic and foreign audiences while in fact agreeing to something less than desired out of the public eye. The war could then be de-escalated a step at a time. Since each side might remain armed during the de-escalation process, if any party felt its interests were being violated in contravention to the "understanding" it would retain the option of re-escalating the conflict. This approach permits the gradual acceptance by all parties of the realities of the compromise understanding without forcing any to suddenly and publically forsake a long maintained, at the cost of tens of thousands of lives, stance on the issues central to the war.



The United States must assume a most flexible posture during the negotiations. It is well for the U.S. to remember that while the concepts of Duty, Honor, Trust and Prestige are important to the United States, they are, as well, critical to the DRV public position. The NLF Trusts North Vietnam to continue to Honor its pledge and Duty to provide aid and assistance to the insurgency. Because the DRV is, as is the United States to the RVN, publically committed to the NLF, the North Vietnamese Prestige is tied to the NLF success or failure.



## VI

### WHAT COURSE?

In spite of the basic and fundamental differences between the belligerents there are indications that the war is moving towards a negotiated settlement. The first factor pushing the war in this direction is the growing ARVN proficiency. The Tet Offensive, although scoring spectacular initial success, failed to achieve its objectives of triggering a general, anti-GVN uprising or the capture of a single important city. The disposition of U.S. troops on interdiction missions meant that the burden of fighting during the first critical hours of the Communist Offensive fell on the ARVN which succeeded in containing the DRV/NLF effort.<sup>1</sup>

The intensity of the offensive can be viewed as a DRV/NLF victory because it demonstrated a capability to launch offensive operations despite years of vigorous allied military activity. Equally important, however, was the ARVN success first in containing and then, with U.S. help, defeating the offensive producing a boost in ARVN self-confidence.<sup>2</sup> This boost was given a powerful stimulus from the National Assembly when on 9 April 1968 President Thieu asked for and received authority to mobilize the nation.<sup>3</sup> For the expanded effort against the Communists the ARVN was to be increased by 100,000 and the local militia by an additional 94,000.<sup>4</sup> To assist in the mobilization and upgrading of the ARVN the U.S. started equipping the South Vietnamese with the automatic m-16 rifle, additional artillery, transportation helicopters, jet planes, patrol boats and assault boats and greatly expanding

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<sup>1</sup>The New York Times, 1-23 February 1968, various.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, 2 April 1968, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid, 10 April 1968, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid, 1 February 1969, p. 12.





ARVN training and officer procurement programs.

The first results of these efforts was the "accelerated pacification" program. The expanded militia permitted the release of the improved regular ARVN units from static defense to offensive sweeps which in turn generated more secure areas. In the enhanced security environment pacification teams attempted to win the allegiance of the people by providing protection, medical care, administering the new land reform program and educating the peasants.

After all the years of fighting and volumes of advice ignored, the RVN finally seems to have acknowledged that the NLF is waging a revolution assisted by armed force. The correct counter-strategy is to wage a more successful revolution rather than the counter-productive strategy of waging war and hoping the political questions will sort themselves out while the insurgency is crushed. Bombs, bullets and napalm kill people, not ideas. An added benefit to waging a better revolution than the guerrilla is the reliable intelligence voluntarily provided by the friendly villager which translates into more effective counter-guerrilla operations and significantly higher kill ratios.

While the claimed advances of the accelerated pacification program must be viewed with some skepticism the fact remains that there has been a gradual but significant change in RVN views of negotiations with and concessions to the NLF and the inclusion of dissidents within the GVN. This general change in attitude has corresponded with the gradual progress in the pacification program. In April 1968, following the announcement of the U.S. and DRV intentions to open negotiations President Thieu had to go to the National Assembly to calm the alarmed members and assure them that the RVN would never



talk with or recognize the NLF. At the same time Vice President Ky had responded to a correspondent's question as to whether the GVN was prepared to make concessions to the NLF to promote a peaceful settlement:

No mister!... Everyone speaks of justice and freedom. Yet we are the victim of aggression and now peoples ask us to make concessions...North Vietnam is large. Let the Communists and those who support them go there to live.<sup>5</sup>

By February 1969, with the pacification program claiming 86% of the villages either secure or relatively secure,<sup>6</sup> the RVN position had been modified considerably. Ky indicated that the RVN recognized the NLF as a "reality" and was prepared to meet with their representative as soon as the PAVN elements left South Vietnam:

If, after the withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops the Viet Cong want come and talk about a political settlement we will talk with them... If Hanoi and Washington can arrange the withdrawal of their troops we can solve these problems ourselves.<sup>7</sup>

This moderate position was further amended during March 1969. The RVN is now reliably reported to be favoring a "Greek" type solution where a disarmed NLF is, with appropriate international guarantees, assimilated into the political landscape under some name other than the NLF.<sup>8</sup> Thieu is now confident that the NLF could not gain power through a parliamentary maneuver since it is unlikely that they could win over twenty seats out of the total of 199 in the National Assembly.<sup>9</sup> This growing political confidence in South Vietnam

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid, 18 February 1969, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid, 10 February 1969, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid, 27 March 1969, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.



is illustrated by the fact that in spite of the DRV/NLF Spring 1969 Offensive village elections were held throughout much of South Vietnam. To consolidate his own political position President Thieu recently succeeded in forming a political party made up of the ten largest political parties represented in the National Assembly. Thus going hand-in-glove with the proven increase in the ARVN's combat capabilities and pacification progress is the increasing political assurance of the RVN in general and President Thieu in particular.

The first slight bending in the Communist position occurred at the 6 February 1969 Peace Conference meeting when the NLF chief negotiator hinted at PAVN presence in South Vietnam when he said:

...in their justified fight, the 14 million South Vietnamese benefit from the devoted aid of their 17 million brethren in the North...<sup>10</sup>

This may represent the first steps toward recognizing the large scale presence of PAVN units within South Vietnam. This in turn could lead to a DRV-U.S. agreement on mutual withdrawals.

Three months later Kiem (the chief NLF negotiator) made another slight shift when, at the April 30<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Peace Conference, he said that the NLF's Five Point program, which had heretofore been non-negotiable, were now the "basis for discussion with other parties" in order to "make the conference go forward."<sup>11</sup> At the next session the NLF presented its new Ten Point Peace Program for the solution of the war in Vietnam. While the program is based on Hanoi's Four Points and the NLF's Five Points and contains most of of the time-worn phrases calling for a U.S. withdrawal, it may represent a

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid, 22 February 1969, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid, 1 May 1969, p. 1.



significant step in the quest for peace. Of particular interest are points 3, 4, 5, 9, and 10:

- 3- ...The question of the Vietnamese armed forces in South Vietnam shall be resolved by the Vietnamese parties themselves.
- 4- ...They decide themselves the political regime of South Vietnam through free and democratic general elections...a coalition government...installed, reflecting national concord and the broad union of all social strata.
- 5- ...During the period intervening between the restoration of peace and...elections neither party shall impose its political regime on the people of Vietnam...The political forces...that stand for peace, independence and neutrality... will enter talks to set up a provisional, coalition government.
- 9- To resolve the aftermath of war:
  - (A) The parties will negotiate the release of army men captured in war.
  - (B) The U.S. government must bear full responsibility for the losses and devastation it has caused...both zones.
- 10- The parties shall reach agreement on an international supervision about the withdrawal from South Vietnam of the troops, military personnel, arms and war material of the United States and the other foreign countries of the American camp.<sup>12</sup>

Points 3 and 4 seem to be concessions holding out the possibility of NVA withdrawals and a coalition government. However, in point 5 "all social strata" referred to in point 4 is defined as those groups standing for peace. Since, in NLF jargon, the RVN definitely does not stand for peace, it would seem that the RVN is to be excluded.

These definitions concerning the provisional government could well cause a serious deadlock in the negotiations. The US/RVN insist<sup>13</sup> on an RVN interim government while the NLF demands a coalition government which by definition of

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<sup>12</sup>Los Angeles Times, 9 May 1969, p. 12.

<sup>13</sup>New York Times, 10 June 1969, p. 1.





its composition could not include the RVN. It is also important that the international supervision called for in Point 10 is to supervise only the U.S. and allied withdrawal from Vietnam. Taken as a whole the NLF's 10 Points are illustrative of the vast gulf separating the belligerents. To suppose that after all these years the RVN or the U.S. would agree to a Communist controlled government in South Vietnam is absurd. The question then is to what extent the NLF and/or the DRV are willing to compromise on NLF control of the South Vietnamese government and what role the present RVN leadership would play in that government.

The usual Communist negotiating technique of presenting a list of demands and then doggedly insisting on opposition concessions to meet those demands while themselves remaining immune to reason or logic is under considerable pressure in Paris and the jungles and paddies of Vietnam. The DRV/NLF are facing an increasingly unpleasant military, political and diplomatic squeeze. During the first 3½ months of 1969 over 12,000 insurgents defected to the GVN<sup>14</sup> which is the highest sustained rate of the war. The ARVN morale and efficiency are rising with the receipt of modern U.S. equipment. As the ARVN becomes more capable the possibility of the DRV/NLF forcing the RVN to make greater concessions than those already made becomes more remote and, in fact, the RVN position may drastically harden. The accelerated pacification program is making political in-roads in the NLF rural support.

In the diplomatic sphere both China and the Soviets are, for different reasons, interested in a negotiated solution. Adding teeth to their quiet

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid, 27 April 1969, p. 7.



urging that the war in South Vietnam be de-escalated to achieve a U.S. withdrawal and that it be fought by indigenous personnel with little or no outside support, the CPR has blockaded the rail shipment of Soviet war material to the DRV. All of these developments threaten the military, political and diplomatic base from which a policy of protracted negotiations designed to wear down rather than compromise with the opposition can be sustained.

In the atmosphere of growing RVN political and military confidence and competence, a long delay in reaching agreement may permanently jeopardize the DRV and NLF negotiating foundation. It would therefore seem to be in the best interests of the DRV and the NLF to agree to a settlement which will remove America from the arena while preserving the political integrity of the NLF. This would permit the NLF to move back to Phase I of the guerrilla struggle without loss of face or political power to rebuild for a new attempt on the RVN, minus U.S. support, at some future date. Such a maneuver would insure the survival of the NLF, please the Soviets because the Chinese strategy would not have been wholly satisfactory yet the NLF would not have been annihilated and finally would satisfy the Chinese because it would remove the U.S. from a position where it threatened the CPR without sacrificing the NLF.

The major ingredient for peace has now been fulfilled: all the participants and major supporters want, for a variety of reasons, a negotiated settlement. There is increasing military, political and diplomatic pressure on the DRV and the NLF inhibiting the usual Communist negotiating techniques and tending to force the DRV and NLF to seek a solution within a period of months instead of years. However, since all interested parties have heavily invested national political capital, prestige and honor in Vietnam, the negotiations



must be conducted in secret. Whatever progress might be made during the negotiations will, out of political necessity, be disguised in the rhetoric and agonizing slowness of the apparent progress. None of the central parties can publically acquiesce to the demands of any other. Therefore, agreements will be reached, if at all, and accomplished in almost infinitesimal steps without public acknowledgment of concessions which will become visible only to the trained observer over an extended period as the war is permitted to gradually de-escalate and fade from the public eye.

The approach, during these secret negotiations, most likely to result in anything resembling peace lies in accommodating the NLF. Their leadership has repeatedly emphasized that the independence and neutrality of South Vietnam is an essential war objective in opposition to the DRV emphasis on unification. This may be a tactical maneuver designed to establish a fictitious independent status for the NLF. However, the greatly strengthened, politically and militarily, GVN can afford to be generous in dealing with the NLF.

Alone the RVN is incapable of applying sufficient military pressure to force major concessions from or to defeat the NLF. The U.S. is unwilling to bear the burden of applying anything approaching that kind of military pressure. However, by dramatically offering the NLF a real, significant and truly legitimate role in South Vietnamese political life commensurate with their not insignificant rural support while giving ironclad guarantees against reprisals, the NLF could, at this time, be lured away from the DRV. The DRV is under considerable pressure from the Soviets and the CPR to reach a settlement or, at least, de-escalate the fighting to permit a face-saving U.S. disengagement. The NLF must be aware of these pressures. Considering



the DRV's demonstrated willing sacrifice of the southern Vietminh under USSR and CPR pressure, at the conclusion of the First Indochina War, to reach a settlement, a generous offer at this time might be well received by the NLF.

Without undue risk such an RVN offer could include:

- a. NLF membership in an interim provisional government on a national and provincial level during the period between an armistice and national elections.
- b. National elections, to determine national, provincial and district government, based on universal suffrage. The elections could be supervised by joint RVN-NLF inspection teams with, if desired, international supervision.
- c. Joint RVN-NLF armistice supervision teams to supervise the armistice with the understanding that the NLF could remain armed until after the elections but would, as would the ARVN, refrain from force, threat of force or terror to intimidate voters. Once elections were held, the NLF would disarm and be assimilated into the political and social landscape of South Vietnam.
- d. Joint RVN-NLF civil liberties supervision and inspection teams to prevent the use of reprisals or terror following the armistice and to guarantee the civil liberties of all South Vietnamese.
- e. Joint RVN-NLF inspection team with U.S., DRV and international observers to supervise the withdrawal of all non-South Vietnamese forces from South Vietnam.

Permitting the NLF to provisionally remain armed gives both the NLF and RVN recourse to arms to force compliance if the joint inspection teams discover violations which cannot be worked out peacefully under the armistice agreement. While this may sound destabilizing, in actuality, it would have the opposite effect since the violators would know that continuation of the violations would lead to direct military action and therefore inhibit violations.

An international body has no recourse to force and to be of even limited effectiveness must operate on the basis of consensus, with world opinion the only bludgeon available to threaten violators. Thus rather than inhibiting, the international guarantee encourages violation since it may, if its findings are inconvenient, simply be ignored.





The joint inspection teams could, with a provisionally armed NLF, therefore more adequately guarantee compliance with the agreement and protect the rights of all of the South Vietnamese citizenry.

The one man, one vote concept inherent in such a plan, for the very reason it would be attractive to the RVN, might be unsatisfactory to the NLF since their military strength probably exceeds their political support.

Unfortunately, it is entirely possible the offer would not be well received either because the NLF feels it can eventually gain control of South Vietnam by relentlessly applying military and political pressure or because the NLF is, in fact, a DRV vassal. The issues involved are so basic, so fundamental that agreement is, at best, extremely difficult while, at worst, impossible. The distrust and hatred born and nurtured in the flames of battle do not make concessions on such issues as control of a provisional government easy to give or, for that matter, easy to accept since neither side is willing to consider that the concession was given in good faith, rather than as a Trojan Horse.

The effort should, however, be made since a failure to reach agreement soon could have most far-reaching and significant repercussions. It is possible for the U.S. to make limited troop withdrawals as the ARVN gains in proficiency. However, as long as the war continues at anything approaching the present level of violence, large scale cuts in U.S. manpower are not feasible unless the United States decides to abandon South Vietnam.

For the reasons already discussed, the U.S. will not abandon Vietnam. But the President is now and will in the future come under increasingly heavy fire to "do something about Vietnam." The recent Gallup Polls show only 19%



of the American population believe that a continuation of the present fight and negotiate policy is the best approach towards a solution. An overwhelming 70% feel the negotiations are making no progress. A very substantial minority, 32%, favor a policy of greatly escalating the war to bring it to a rapid military solution.<sup>15</sup> While most Americans want to get out of the quagmire in Vietnam, there is wide-spread opposition to unilateral withdrawal.

Since the ARVN cannot carry all the combat load and the U.S. cannot unilaterally withdraw without shattering its global system of mutual defense pacts, it seems likely that the pressure to again resort to dangerous escalation, as the vehicle for getting out of Vietnam, will grow. America has traditionally been an impatient and violent nation. As the frustration mounts, the 32% favoring escalation can be expected to rise significantly if the negotiating deadlock is not soon broken.

Having so swiftly risen to a position as the pre-eminent world power, assuming the mantle of defender of freedom, the nation has not yet learned to bear all the trials and tribulations of greatness, to cope with small and offensive countries . As a nation, America has not lost the innocent's belief that all problems are soluble with either good will or, failing in that, a devastating military assault.

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid, 23 March 1969, p. 3. Next to those who responded "don't know," those favoring "withdrawal" comprised a sizable segment of those polled with 26%. However, since the question referring to withdrawal was not modified to reflect any preference as the conditions under which withdrawal would take place, the question appears to be misleading. For instance most Americans are anxious to get the war over with so the troops can be withdrawn: how many of the respondents would favor a withdrawal if it would result in a Communist victory in Vietnam?



As the Congressional elections approach the President will be subjected to increasing pressure to set a national course leading to a resolution of this war prior to November 1970. While it is presently unlikely that the Nixon Administration will heed the call to escalate, the war should be expected to continue to polarize and radicalize American domestic politics. As Hanoi and the NLF continue to maintain their intransigent posture in Paris while simultaneously mounting casualty-producing offensives in South Vietnam, the process of polarization may carry over into the explosive international environment. The pressure for a radical solution to the war may eventually become irresistible. The DRV/NLF may be counting on a unilateral American withdrawal as that radical solution. However, the opposite may be true.

On the other hand, Vietnam may represent America's loss of innocence with the realization that some problems are not soluble but rather can be made only more or less irritating, painful or dangerous. That realization may lead America to the stoic's endurance of pain and frustration; specifically the pain and frustration that may accompany the realization that the war in Vietnam is not likely to end suddenly or, perhaps, even soon. Rather it will drift slowly through a fog of domestic and international uncertainty towards some dim and unknown shore. The only certainty about the voyage is the assurance that every point of the compass will shape a course through danger and death with hope and determination the only buoys.



## Appendix I

Many notable scholars of this period such as B. B. Fall, Jean Lacoutre, Philippe Devillers, Viktor Bator and Joseph Buttinger agree that of the three communist governments at the 1954 Geneva Conference the DRV was the least inclined to compromise. Vietminh retreats from Geneva demands were made only at the insistence of the USSR and the CPR. Although victorious, the Vietminh had been roughly handled by the French Expeditionary Force in the Spring of 1954 and needed peace in which to consolidate its gains. However, the Vietminh leadership believed total victory was within reach. Therefore, compromise with the French was unnecessary since the French were doomed. (Joseph Buttinger, Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled, p. 831) On the other hand, both the Soviets and the Chinese were much more receptive to a compromise. The prospects of large scale U.S. intervention were viewed with alarm in both Moscow and Peking.

If the Americans entered the war the Chinese would again be tested by the cruel dilemma so recently experienced in Korea. Either they would have to watch an American destruction, physical and perhaps political, of a friendly, communist buffer state adjacent to the Mainland or or intervene militarily suffering enormous casualties while attempting to compensate, as in Korea, with manpower the vastly superior American firepower.

Because of Indochina's geographical location the Soviets would be unable to exert military pressure directly in the theater of combat operations. If the Geneva Conference failed and the U.S. intervened the Soviets would be placed in a most awkward position. To relieve any American pressure in Indochina, the Soviets could only increase tensions in Europe. However, the specter of an aggressive and actively threatening USSR in Europe would greatly enhance the possibility of general ratification of the European





Defense Community then pending. The European unifying influence and the EDC's attendant supra-national Army were earnestly opposed in Moscow. Additionally, the United States, which had just exploded the world's first operational thermonuclear weapon during an air drop test in the Pacific, had an intercontinental nuclear delivery system capable of devastating the Soviet heartland. The Soviets possessed neither an H-bomb nor a delivery system capable of striking the American core region. These painful realities meant that any Soviet attempts to "save" the DRV would have to be made outside the main theater of combat operations and at the greatest peril to the vital security interests of the Soviet Union itself. However, to acquiesce to an American destruction of the DRV would be a crushing political blow to the Soviet image, carefully built and nurtured, as protector from U.S. imperialism of their East European wards.

With the more global political outlooks of the Soviet Union and the CPR and the grave threats to their own national security which would accompany any U.S. military intervention in Indochina, it is not surprising that the Soviet and Chinese sights were significantly lower at Geneva than those of the DRV.

Further substantiating the thesis of Vietminh acquiescence to intense Soviet and Chinese pressure for compromise were the comments of the top level DRV leadership following the Conference. They openly complained of this pressure forcing the DRV to accept a negotiated settlement less favorable than the battlefield realities warranted. (New York Times, 25 July, 1954, p. 1.)



## Appendix II

Chronology of Events in Vietnam  
and Southeast Asia

note: Compiled mainly from The Committee on Foreign Relations, The United States Senate, 91<sup>st</sup> Congress, First Session Report: Background Information relating to Southeast Asia and Vietnam (5<sup>th</sup> Revised ed.).

## 1945

- 2 September                    Ho Chi Minh proclaims the independence of Democratic Republic of Vietnam.
- 6 March                        France recognizes the DRV as a "free state within the French Union."
- 23 November                French, through a series of misunderstandings, open fire on Haiphong civilian population killing 6,000.
- 19 December                The First Indochina War begins as Vietminh Forces attack French positions throughout Indochina.

## 1947

- March                        Last attempts at French-Vietminh reconciliation efforts collapse.

## 1948

- 5 June                        Bao Dai, French High Commissioner Emile Bollert, and Gen. Nguyen Van Xuan sign the Baie d'Along Agreement to establish State of Vietnam with Bao Dai as chief of State within the French Union.

## 1949

- 8 March                        The Elysee Agreement, in the form of an exchange of letters between Bao Dai and President Auriol of France, outline the general principles affecting French-Vietnam relations.

## 1950

- 7 February                    Great Britain and the United States extend de jure welcomes to Vietnam.
- 23 December                United States signs Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement with France, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos for indirect U.S. military aid to Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.



1951

7 September United States signs agreement with Vietnam for direct economic assistance.

8 May-July 21 Geneva Conference on Indochina. The delegates are from Great Britain and the USSR, (joint chairman), France, the United States, Communist China, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam and the Vietminh regime. Agreements are signed on July 20 and 21 and the main provisions concerning Vietnam are that (1) Vietnam is to be partitioned along the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel into North and South Vietnam, (2) regulations are imposed on foreign military bases and personnel and on increased armaments, (3) countrywide elections, leading to the reunification of North and South Vietnam, are to be held by July 20, 1956, and (4) an International Control Commission (ICC) is to be established to supervise the implementation of the agreements. The United States and Vietnam are not signatories to the agreements. The United States issues a unilateral declaration stating that it (1) "will refrain from the threat or the use of force to disturb" the Geneva agreements, (2) "would view any renewal of the aggression in violation of the aforesaid agreements with grave concern and as seriously threatening international peace and security," and (3) "shall continue to work to achieve unity through free elections, supervised by the UN to insure that they are conducted fairly."

August Flow of almost one million refugees from North to South Vietnam begins.

24 October President Eisenhower sends a letter to Premier Diem of South Vietnam stating that American assistance will be given hereafter not through the French authorities, but directly to the Government of South Vietnam. The letter also states that the U.S. Government "expects this aid will be met by...undertaking needed reforms."

1955

19 February Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty (SEATO)---with its protocol covering Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos---comes into force.

20 July Talks were scheduled to begin (according to Geneva agreement) for the preparation of all-Vietnam elections to be held on July 20, 1956, to reunite the country. The Government of South Vietnam rejects the



North Vietnamese Government's invitation to discuss the elections, on the grounds that in North Vietnam the people would not be able to express their will freely and that falsified votes in North Vietnam could overrule the votes in South Vietnam.

## 1956

6 April Vietnam Government announces it will continue to co-operate with the ICC and reiterates its position of supporting Vietnam-wide elections at such time as conditions in Communist North Vietnam permit genuinely free voting.

## 1957

3 January International Control Commission reports that between December 1955 and August 1956 neither North Vietnam nor South Vietnam have been fulfilling their obligations under the 1954 Armistice Agreement.

22 October Bombing of U.S. MAAG and USIS installations in Saigon; U.S. personnel injured.

## 1958

4 January Large Communist guerrilla band attacks plantation north of Saigon, reflecting steady increase in Communist armed activity in South Vietnam since mid-1957.

8 July Communist guerrillas attack Vietnamese military base at Bien Hoa, killing and wounding several US MAAG personnel.

10 July In Belgian Communist publication Red Flag, Ho Chi Minh, head of the North Vietnamese Communist regime, states "we are building socialism in Vietnam, but we are building it in only one part of the country, while in the other part we still have to direct and bring to a close the middle-class democratic and anti-imperialist revolution."

## 1960

30 April An opposition group of 18, calling themselves the Committee for progress and Liberty, send letter to President Diem demanding drastic economic, administrative, and military reforms.

5 May United States announces that at the request of the Government of South Vietnam, the U.S. Military





Assistance and Advisory Group will be increased by the end of the year from 327 to 685 members.

- 26 October            President Eisenhower assures President Ngo Dinh Diem, in a letter of good wishes on South Vietnam's fifth anniversary, that "for so long as our strength can be useful, the United States will continue to assist Vietnam in the difficult yet hopeful struggle ahead."
- 11 November        Military coup attempt against President Diem's regime.
- 12 November        Loyalist troops enter the capitol and subdue the rebels. According to press reports from Saigon, an estimated 200 soldiers and civilians were killed during the fighting.
- 20 December        National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam is formed in South Vietnam.

1961

- 5 May                President Kennedy declares at a press conference that consideration is being given to the sue of U.S. forces, if necessary, to help South Vietnam resist Communist pressures. He declares that this will be one of the subjects discussed during the forthcoming visit of Vice President Johnson in South Vietnam.
- 16 November        Following closely the recommendations in General Taylor's report, President Kennedy (with the approval of the National Security Council) decides to bolster South Vietnam's military strength, but not to commit U.S. combat forces at this time.
- 14 December        U.S. President Kennedy pledges increased aid to South Vietnam.

1962

- 8 February        United States reorganizes its South Vietnam military command, establishes new "U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam" under four-star Gen. Paul D. Harkins.
- 15 May              President Kennedy announces that at the request of the Thai Government and "because of recent attacks in Laos by Communist forces and the subsequent movement of Communist military units toward the border of Thailand," he has ordered U.S. military forces to Thailand.



- 2 June Canadian and Indian members of the ICC find North Vietnam guilty of subversion and covert aggression against South Vietnam. The Polish delegation to the Commission rejects the charge.
- 23 July Declaration and protocol on the neutrality of Laos is signed by 14-nation conference at Geneva.
- 30 July United States completes the withdrawal of the 5,000 Marines sent to Thailand.

## 1963

- 8 May Riot erupts in northern city of Hue, former imperial capital, 400 miles north of Saigon.
- 3 June Buddhist demonstrations break out in Hue. Martial law is swiftly imposed.
- 11 June Buddhist monk (Thich Quang Duc) commits suicide by burning himself to death with gasoline in front of the Cambodian legation. Further aggravates religious crisis involving South Vietnamese Buddhists.
- 17 July Armed policemen used clubs against 1,000 Buddhists protesting religious discrimination in front of a pagoda in Saigon.
- 21 August Martial law is proclaimed throughout South Vietnam by President Diem after hundreds of armed police and government troops raided the main Buddhist Xa Loi pagoda in Saigon.
- 2 September Times of Vietnam charges that U.S. Central Intelligence Agency agents had planned a coup d'etat for August 28 to overthrow President Diem.
- 1 November Military coup (organized by the key generals of the armed forces) against the Diem regime.
- 2 November Military leaders in South Vietnam set up a provisional Government headed by former Vice President Nguyen Ngoc Tho (a Buddhist) as Premier. The Constitution is suspended and the National Assembly dissolved. Buddhists, students and other political prisoners arrested by the former regime are released.
- 22 November President John F. Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas, Texas. His successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, affirms on 24 November the U.S. intention to continue its military and economic support of South Vietnam's struggle against the Communist Vietcong.



1964

- 2 January Secretary Rusk announces in news conference that "A Vietnamese Army group seized in the delta area of Vietnam some 300,000 rounds of small arms ammunition, weapons like mortars, recoilless ammunition, made in China" and that almost certainly Hanoi was primarily responsible for their infiltration into South Vietnam.
- 27 January U.S. Secretary of Defense McNamara in a speech before the House Armed Services Committee states that the situation in South Vietnam "continues grave," but that "the survival of an independent Government in South Vietnam is so important to the security of southeast Asia and to the free world that I can conceive of no alternative other than to take all necessary measures within our capability to prevent a Communist victory." France establishes diplomatic relations with Communist China.
- 21 May United States initiates reconnaissance flight over Laos.
- 22 May Secretary Rusk stating the choices in Vietnam, says: "A third choice would be to expand the war. This can be the result if the Communists persist in their course of aggression."
- 27 May United States announces that several T-28 fighter-bombers have been sent to Laos.
- 6-7 June Two U.S. reconnaissance planes are shot down by Pathet Lao ground fire from the Plain of Jars.
- 2 August USS Maddox is attacked in international waters off the coast of North Vietnam by North Vietnamese torpedo boats.
- 4 August Destroyer C. Turner Joy and destroyer Maddox are attacked by North Vietnamese PT boats.
- 4 August United States sends reinforcements to Tonkin Bay area.
- 5 August President Johnson's message to Congress; joint resolution is introduced "To promote the maintenance of international peace and security in Southeast Asia.
- 7 August U.S. Congress approves southeast Asia resolution (Senate vote, 88-2; House vote, 416-0). General Khanh declares state of emergency in Vietnam.



- 11 August President Johnson signs southeast Asia resolution into law (Public Law 88-408).
- 24 December Terrorist bombing in Saigon kills 2 Americans and wounds 52 Americans and 13 Vietnamese.

## 1965

- 8 January South Korea sends 2,000 military advisors to South Vietnam.
- 7 February Communist guerrillas stage attack on U.S. outpost U.S. planes strike targets in North Vietnam. U.S. dependents evacuated from South Vietnam.
- 10 February Vietcong blow up U.S. military billet at coastal city of Quinhon, killing 23 soldiers.
- 15 February Chinese Communists threaten to enter the war if American troops enter North Vietnam.
- 25 February North Vietnamese officials state negotiations would be considered if American troops were withdrawn.
- 28 February United States and South Vietnamese officials declare that President Johnson has decided to open continuous limited air strikes against North Vietnam in order to bring about a negotiated settlement.
- 6 March Secretary General U Thant proposes that the United States, the USSR, Great Britain, France, Communist China, and North and South Vietnam participate in a preliminary conference.
- 9 March United States rejects U Thant's offer until North Vietnam stops its aggression against South Vietnam.
- 1 April Seventeen nonaligned nations meeting in Belgrade appeal for immediate negotiations.
- 2 April United States announces intention of sending several thousand more troops to South Vietnam.
- 7 April President Johnson, in a speech at Johns Hopkins University stresses our willingness to negotiate, and suggests a \$1 billion aid program for southeast Asia.
- 11 April North Vietnam officials denounce President Johnson's offer to negotiate.





14 April                   The United States urges Hanoi to consider the plea of 17 nonaligned nations for peace talks.

6 May                    Two U.S. Marine battalions sent to Vietnam; first combat units to be deployed to South Vietnam.

12 May                   Red Chinese Chief of Staff calls for preparation for atomic war. President Johnson declares that Peiping prevents Hanoi from agreeing to talks.

19 May                   United States resumes air attacks on North Vietnamese targets.

16 June                  Secretary McNamara announces new troop movements to Vietnam which will bring total there to over 70,000.

24 June                  The new South Vietnamese Government under Brig. Gen. Nguyen Cao Ky announces a series of measures including a formal state of war, extension of Saigon's curfew, and price controls.

25 June                  President Johnson in an address at ceremonies in San Francisco commemorating the 20th anniversary of the signing of the UN charter declares that "bilateral diplomacy" for a peaceful settlement has "yielded no results." He adds, "I now call upon this gathering of the nations of the world to use all their influence, individually and collectively, to bring to the table those who seem determined to make war. We will support your efforts as we will support effective action by an agent or agency of these United Nations."

28 June                  American troops participate in their first major attack of the Vietnamese war.

4 July                   In a Voice of America broadcast Secretary of State Dean Rusk says that on several occasions, the United States, the United States, acting through an unnamed intermediary, had asked Hanoi "what would be stopped if we stopped the (aerial) bombing ...we've never had a reply."

10 July                  President Johnson declares in a press conference that in Vietnam, "we committed our power and our honor and that has been reaffirmed by three Presidents."

12-18 July               The United States begins a large-scale build-up of its forces in South Vietnam.



- 28 July U.S. Ambassador Arthur Goldberg delivers a note to Secretary General U Thant from President Johnson asking the UN to employ its "resources, energy, and immense prestige" in finding ways "to halt aggression and bring peace in Vietnam."
- 11 August The Soviet Union indicates, in an editorial, in the Communist Party paper, Pravda, that it would have no part of any American efforts to involve the UN in Vietnam.
- 9 December Ho Chi Minh, in an interview with British journalist Felix Greene, calls President Johnson's offer of unconditional talks "absolutely unacceptable."
- 15 December U.S. Air Force planes bomb and destroy a North Vietnamese thermal power plant at Uongbi in the first American air raid on a major North Vietnamese industrial target.
- 17 December U.S. Government sources confirm a report that Ho Chi Minh relayed an offer to hold talks leading to negotiations through two private Italian intermediaries.
- 18 December A North Vietnamese statement calls reports of Hanoi's peace feelers "sheer groundless fabrications."
- 25 December Upon the expiration of the 30-hour cease-fire General Westmoreland issues an order to United States and allied troops to retain their defensive posture and not to fire unless attacked.
- 26 December United States and South Vietnamese offensive operations are resumed in the face of a resumption of heavy Vietcong attacks; however, the suspension of air raids on North Vietnam is continued.

## 1966

- 17 January Gen. Wallace M. Greene, Jr., a U.S. Marine Corps commandant, declares after returning from a 13-day tour of southeast Asia: "you can kill every Vietcong and North Vietnamese and still lose the war unless" the Vietnamese villages are rehabilitated and reorganized.
- 20 February South Korea announces it will send an additional division and a regiment to South Vietnam.
- 8 March Australia announces its intention of tripling its Vietnam force from 1,500 to 4,500 by June 1966.



- 22 April Pauline Frederick, NBC reporter, quotes a Soviet informant as stating that North Vietnam would be willing to enter into peace negotiations, if the United States would halt the bombing of the north.
- 26 April The State Department reiterates previous warnings that planes of Communist China or other nations attacking allied aircraft over North Vietnam will be pursued into the territory of their home "sanctuary" if necessary.
- 10 July The Defense Department announces that U.S. forces in Vietnam will expand to 375,000 by the end of 1966 and to 425,000 by the spring of 1967.
- 11 July The United States is reported to be carrying out over 100 air strikes a day over Communist infiltration routes in Laos.
- 14 July Secretary Rusk warns Hanoi against trying captured U.S. pilots as war criminals.
- 19 July North Vietnamese Ambassadors in Peiping and Prague report that captured American pilots will go on trial in Hanoi.
- 20 July At a news conference, President Johnson warns Hanoi that the American people would regard war-crime trials of American prisoners as "very revolting and repulsive" and that they would "react accordingly." Pope Paul calls on North Vietnam to accord American prisoners "the safety and the treatment provided for by international norms."
- 23 July In response to a cable from the President of CBS, Ho Chi Minh declares there is "no trial in view" for American prisoners. Speaking in Indianapolis, President Johnson says: "We are not going to run out on South Vietnam.... However long it takes, we will persist until the Communists end the fighting or negotiate an honorable peace."
- 7 August Former Vice President Nixon, in Saigon, suggests that 500,000 American troops are needed in Vietnam to shorten the war.
- 10 August Thailand's Premier officially opens the U.S. airbase at U-Tapao, capable of handling B-52 bombers.
- 5 September President Johnson says that a U.S. troop withdrawal from South Vietnamese is dependent upon a pull-out of Communist forces.



- 4 October U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union, Foy D. Kohler, warns that an American blockade of North Vietnam would raise the risk of a military confrontation with the USSR.
- 6 October North Vietnam rejects Secretary General Thant's appeal for a mutual de escalation of the ground war but endorses his call for a cessation of the U.S. bombing of the north.
- 31 December U.S. troop strength in South Vietnam reaches 389,000. U.S. battle deaths in Vietnam reach 6,644, while total wounded reached 37,738.

## 1967

- 3 January Thailand announces its intention to send troops to Vietnam and begins to train a 2,400-man volunteer regiment, which is expected to be sent in the summer of 1967.
- 5 January North Vietnam's chief diplomatic representative in Western Europe states that if the United States will "definitely and unconditionally" stop bombing his country, Hanoi will "examine and study" proposals for negotiations.
- 28 January North Vietnam's Foreign Minister asserts that "it is only after the unconditional ending of the bombing and other acts of war being carried out by the United States against North Vietnam that there can be talks between the two countries." He also reiterates that Hanoi's four points provide the basis of a settlement.
- 25 February A newly released Gallup Poll indicates that 67 percent of the American people favor continuing the bombing of North Vietnam.
- 22 March U.S. officials announce plans to base B-52 bombers in Thailand for use in Vietnam.
- 23 March Senator Edward Brooke, upon his return from Southeast Asia, shifts his position on Vietnam to one of general support for administration policy. He expresses the opinion that North Vietnam at present is not interested in meaningful negotiations.
- 28 March Communist China's Premier Chou En-lai, in an interview published in several U.S. newspapers in May, warns that China will enter the war if a U.S. invasion of North





Vietnam occurs which threatens China's "security." Chou states that "Americans won't be allowed to approach our borders." He reportedly states that China would intervene if Hanoi was threatened with a "sellout peace" arranged by the U.S. and the USSR.

- 22 May In issuing his Memorial Day proclamation, President Johnson calls on North Vietnam to help negotiate a way "out of this bloody impasse."
- 20 June The United States formally expressed regret for damages caused to the Soviet ship Turkestan on June 2 off the North Vietnamese port of Campha. The Department of Defense on June 18 had conceded that fire from U.S. planes aimed at anti-aircraft guns protecting Campha may have struck the Turkestan. The U.S. note added that every effort would be made to "insure that such incidents do not occur." The United States had earlier denied Soviet charges that American planes had damaged the Soviet ship.
- 30 June Immediately following a Soviet charge that U.S. planes had damaged the Russian merchant ship, Mikhail Frunze, in Haiphong Harbor, the Defense Department acknowledges that American bombs directed at an anti-aircraft site in the port area may have struck the vessel.
- 16 July The United States, in a diplomatic note made public admits that U.S. planes may have bombed the Soviet ship, Mikhail Frunze, in Haiphong Harbor on June 29 but warns that foreign ships entering areas of hostilities run the risk of sustaining damage.
- 12 August Premier Ky denies charges that his government has rigged the coming elections and invites U.S. Congressmen to observe them.
- 17 August President Johnson states during a White House ceremony that South Vietnam's election campaign may not be "without blemish" but that it represents a serious effort to conduct "an open election in a nation under fire." He also says that Generals Thieu and Ky "have given their pledge that they will support the outcome of fair elections whoever wins."
- 27 August Chief of State Thieu said he would meet with individual members of the NLF to discuss problems but would not recognize them as equals or as an official negotiating group.



- 3 September South Vietnam's presidential elections take place. Approximately 4.8 million voters participate--81 percent of the registered voters. General Thieu wins the presidency, receiving about 35 percent of the vote.
- 21 September Speaking to the UN General Assembly, Ambassador Goldberg cites North Vietnam's failure to give a definite pledge that it will enter meaningful negotiations if the United States halts the northern bombing.
- 29 September President Johnson declares in a speech at San Antonio that the United States will stop the bombing of North Vietnam "when this will lead promptly to productive discussions. We would assume that while discussions proceed, North Vietnam would not take advantage of the bombing cessation or limitation."
- 11 November Speaking aboard the aircraft carrier Enterprise, President Johnson suggests that Vietnam peace talks take place aboard a neutral ship in neutral waters.
- 14 November Thailand's Cabinet gives final approval to the dispatch of a full division--10,000 to 12,000 men-- to Vietnam. The State Department acknowledges on November 20 that the United States will provide Thailand with surface-to-air missiles.
- 29 November North Vietnam's army newspaper predicts that American and Communist forces will be embroiled in savage fighting during the next few months.
- 20 December The Washington Post reports that the U.S. Government is considering the use of South Vietnamese troops to pursue the Vietcong into Cambodia and that, according to South Vietnamese officers and American advisers, Cambodian troops had fired across the border into South Vietnam in support of Vietcong operations.

## 1968

- 30-31 January The Communists launch simultaneous attacks on major South Vietnamese cities, including Saigon (January 31), where they temporarily invade the grounds of the U.S. Embassy. President Thieu announces a total cancellation of the 36-hour Allied Tet truce.
- 31 January President Thieu declares martial law throughout South Vietnam as the Communists continue their attacks on Allied basis and major cities. U.S. officials in Saigon state that the Communists had attacked more than



half of South Vietnam's 44 provincial capitals plus 25 airfields.

- 6 February                   Dang Quang Minh, chief National Liberation Front representative in Moscow, states that the NLF aim in its latest attacks was to overthrow the Saigon government.
- 10 March                   The New York Times and Washington Post report that the Johnson administration is considering raising U.S. troop strength in Vietnam by as much as 206,000. White House Press Secretary Christian states on March 9 that the President has received no specific requests from American commanders concerning the sending of additional U.S. forces.
- 31 March                   President Johnson announces that he has ordered U.S. aircraft and naval vessels "to make no attacks on North Vietnam except in the area north of the demilitarized zone where the continuing enemy buildup directly threatens allied forward positions and where the movements of their troops and supplies are clearly related to that threat." He states that the area covered by the bombing pause includes 90 percent of North Vietnam's population. He asserts that a complete bombing halt could come "if our restraint is matched by restraint in Hanoi." He calls on North Vietnam to respond positively to the bombing halt by agreeing to peace talks and states: "We assume that during those talks Hanoi would not take advantage of our restraint."
- 2 April                   President Thieu says that his government had agreed to the partial U.S. bombing halt and warns "that if North Vietnam does not respond with a corresponding good will gesture, it will be hard for us to accept any more good will gestures in the future." He adds that South Vietnam should be strong enough by the end of 1968 to allow a gradual withdrawal of American troops.
- 3 April                   North Vietnam offers to send representatives to meet with U.S. representatives "with a view to determining with the American side the unconditional cessation of the U.S. bombing raids and all other acts of war against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam so that talks may start."
- 27 April                   Hanoi dispatches assert that on April 20-21 the Alliance of National Democratic and Peace Forces met near Saigon and issued a manifesto, stating that the



Alliance "is prepared to enter into discussions with the U.S. Government" but that the NLF "cannot be absent from the settlement of any problem in South Vietnam." The manifesto demanded that the United States withdraw its troops and adhere to the 1954 Geneva Accords.

- 3 May                      President Johnson announces that the United States has accepted a North Vietnamese offer to meet in Paris for preliminary peace talks on May 10 or soon afterwards.
- 19 June                    President Thieu signs South Vietnam's first general mobilization law. He states that the South Vietnamese Government "intends to take over more responsibility" for the war and that it will draft 200,000 men by the end of 1968 under the law.
- 9 July                     A South Vietnamese military spokesman announces that ten members of the Alliance of National, Democratic, and Peace Forces will be tried in absentia for advocating rebellion and neutralism--capital crimes in South Vietnamese legal code. The ten include the Alliance president Trinh Dinh Thao. The ten were sentenced to death on July 12 by a five-man military tribunal after a 23-minute trial.
- 27 August                 South Vietnam's President Thieu states that the recent Communist attacks in South Vietnam were aimed at U.S. public opinion and particularly at the Democratic National Convention. On the subject of negotiations, he says: "We will never talk to the Front. We are willing to talk to Hanoi." With respect to Vietcong participation in future elections, he declares: "I would never accept any Communist to run in an election in Vietnam. When we say one man, one vote, we mean the vote would only be given to Vietnamese citizens who deserve it."
- 31 October                President Johnson announces that the United States will cease "all air, naval, and artillery bombardment of North Vietnam" as of 8 a.m. (Washington time), November 1.
- 4 November                President Thieu states over South Vietnamese television that: "In order to win victories at the negotiating table, we should have victories on the battlefield. We will only be able to force the enemy to accept our conditions if we can destroy as many enemies as possible."





11 December           The U.S. mission in Saigon reports the most optimistic statistics on pacification yet, claiming that 73.3 percent of the South Vietnamese population are living in contested areas while the remaining 13.4 percent are under Vietcong control.

1969

27 January           Vice President Ky states that while he thought it is "too soon" for private talks in Paris with "the other side....I don't see why we can't have contact with the other side if they are willing." Ky says that such private talks "could be anywhere, in Paris or elsewhere."

5 February           President Nixon states at a news conference that the subject of U.S. troop withdrawal from South Vietnam was "high on the agenda of priorities, and that just as soon as either the training program for South Vietnamese forces and their capabilities, the progress of the Paris peace talks "is in our interest and in the interest of bringing progress in those talks."

14 February          The Vietcong high command orders its forces to "launch new simultaneous attacks" and "increase military pressure on all fronts" during the new year.

2 March               The Communists shell Saigon for the first time since February 23, killing at least 10 civilians.

4 March               President Nixon tells a news conference that the administration was reviewing the Communist offensive to determine whether the violation of the understanding with Hanoi leading to the U.S. bombing halt of October 31, 1968, was "so significant that it requires action on our part." Declaring that the offensive had failed to achieve its objectives, the President asserts that the United States "will not tolerate" a continuation of the attacks in violation of the understanding and which "result in heavier casualties to our men." He asserts that the United States "has a number of options that we could exercise to respond."



## Selected Bibliography

Note: This bibliography is but a small selection from the large and growing body of literature pertaining to Vietnam. The works listed, while not intended to be complete or even to include every source used in researching this paper, are those which this writer found most important and representative of the many diverse viewpoints now current on this important subject. The reader is cautioned that the omission of any selection does not necessarily mean that the author did not research that work or judged it to be unimportant.

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